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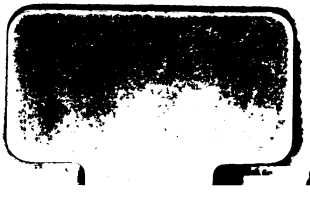

SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. SAMUEL CARR, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S;
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SERMON XXII.

PSALM cxix. Ver. 9.

Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.

IN the former part of this Psalm, the royal writer had expressed his determined resolution of walking uprightly, and keeping the commandments of his God. But struck with the greatness of the task he had undertaken, and conscious of the manifold snares with which the path of unsuspecting youth is ever strewed, he here pauses, as it were, for a moment, to question with himself, how he should best be able to execute the noble but arduous resolution he had formed: "Wherewith shall a young man "cleanse his way?" How shall a young man, such as I am, ignorant and unexperienced, guard his steps aright, amid the corruptions of

a dangerous world, or how shall he so direct his conduct, as to keep himself undefiled and innocent from the great offence? And to this enquiry he returns an answer of the greatest importance; an answer, which ought to be engraven upon the breast of every young man, who wishes to be happy: "By taking heed thereto, "according to thy word."

Here then are the two great rules, which ought to be the invariable guides of every young man's conduct; 1st, That he ought to take heed to his way: and, 2dly, That the measure of this caution ought to be the word of God.

And 1st, He must take heed. This is a lesson which cannot too often, or too strongly, be inculcated upon the mind of every young Christian. Innocent and undesigning himself, he sets forward in the career of life, joyous and unsuspecting. Having felt no danger, he thinks there is none. Unfurnished too with knowledge, unfixed by principles of wisdom, unconfirmed by experience, the thoughtless wanderer is left to the guidance of wayward fancy or youthful passion, he therefore carelessly strays through the fields of pleasure, he gathers the rose buds of the spring, he twines the festive garland of joy and youth, and thinks himself at liberty to follow

follow their delusive call, so long as they do not seem directly to lead him to injure himself or others; not knowing that the serpent of temptation is to be found even in the enchanting walks of paradise itself.

Here then is the time for wisdom to interpose her friendly aid: to tell him, that these are dangerous and deceitful guides: to tell him, that the world is full of snares and dangers, which he sees not: to tell him, that he is in an enemy's country, where every unguarded step may prove fatal, and that every thing from within and without, if not timely prevented, will conspire together to draw him on to ruin and misery.

Let then some friendly monitor, let the voice of parental wisdom remind him, that he carries a secret enemy within him, ever ready to take advantage of his weakness and inexperience; that however wise and sagacious he may fancy himself, his own heart is deceitful above all things, and will, without great care and circumspection, lead him on, by imperceptible gradations, to the brink of infamy and wretchedness; and that it will, therefore, behove him to watch and examine every secret propensity and dawning resolution of the soul; knowing that, however inconsiderable they may at first sight seem,

they are, in reality, no less than the issues of life and death.

Nor will it, secondly, be of less importance to the young Christian to know, that he carries with him a dangerous enemy from without: that the temptations of the flesh are strong by nature, that they are still stronger by indulgence: that it will, therefore, be indispensably necessary for him to cleanse his way by early habit, from all sin and filthiness of the flesh; lest brutal lust and confirmed appetite drown him in perdition both of body and soul.

Let him remember, thirdly, that there is a dangerous and deceitful world to encounter, which will endeavour to seduce his innocence, under a thousand disguises. Is he disposed to mirth and gaiety? It will rush upon his soul with all the charms of novelty and pleasure: it has the power of beauty to invite, and the force of example to allure: it has the bowl of intoxication to stupify his reason, and it has the emissaries of hell to awaken his passions, by instilling the inflammatory poison of wanton description or obscene representation, in those scandalous books and prints, which, to the eternal disgrace of our civil policy, are publicly exposed to sale,

sale, and are the bane and ruin of thousands in these kingdoms.

Is he inclined to business and the active pursuits of life? It has the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them to set before him: it will accost him in the specious language of the tempter, "All these will I give thee, if thou "wilt fall down and worship me:" an offer how often fatal to the conscience, and, like its diabolic author, the father of rapine, fraud, lies, and injustice!

There is a smiling world too, which he has to encounter, no less dangerous to the youthful mind. The proffers of friendship, the entanglements of ambition, the glitter of titles, honours and distinctions, will all display their tinsel finery, to catch his unsuspecting eye, and mislead him from the road of virtue. And, what is worse, should he once yield to their allurement, they will act like a powerful opiate upon his soul, they will benumb the feelings of nature, and render him insensible of danger, till death or disappointment awake him to the stings of conscience and the horrors of eternal vengeance.

Let him expect too, to find a frowning world, to act upon his fears, and drive him from the steady fortress of integrity. He must be prepared to encounter the black train of misfortune, slander, treachery, ingratitude, pain, exile, and dereliction: a task how difficult to the man of the most spotless virtue and collected resolution; and yet how necessary to every one, who travels the rough and dangerous road of human life!

Let him know too, that he has a spiritual adversary ever near him, to take every advantage, to strengthen every temptation, and "as a "roaring lion walking about, seeking whom he "may devour:" that it will therefore behove the young Christian not to be ignorant of his devices, not to throw himself off his guard, but rather, as the Apostle advises, to "be sober, to "be vigilant."

Need I add, will not every young person too soon experimentally find, that he has a weak and corrupt nature, ever ready to receive the impressions of evil, and add strength to outward temptation, to second the assaults of corruption, and yield by treachery the fortress of virtue, where open force has failed? Even the strongest will always find it a task of sufficient labour to counteract the prevailing bias of a frail and corrupt

rupt nature: how arduous a task, therefore, will this be to the unconfirmed imbecility of youth, always pliant and ductile, when formed to the best advantage, and too often soft and unresisting, from the feebleness of a natural false modesty, or the misfortune of a vitious or neglected education!

These are some of the difficulties which every young man has to encounter at his entrance into the world. Highly, therefore, will it become him to walk circumspectly. Nor let him consider this as the task of leisure, or the employment of listless indifference. The trial is arduous, and the issue no less than endless happiness or misery. It will require him, therefore, to summon all his abilities, and to call in all the aids of reason and religion. He must watch the dawnings of sin in his soul with a jealous eye, he must examine every design, he must weigh every consequence, he must stand firm and immoveable against every assault.

And the best method of doing this, will be that recommended by the Psalmist in the words of the text: "he must take heed to his ways, "according to God's word."

Nor need he wish for a better or more complete direction for his conduct. Its precepts are few, plain, and simple; yet contain a most perfect rule of life and manners. They were many of them delivered by illiterate fishermen and mechanics; yet exceed all the boasted rules of philosophy, and all the treasures of ancient wisdom. They point out to him his situation and various relations in life, and furnish him with the fullest instructions for his conduct in it, considered as a dependent, social, and accountable being. They tell him what he owes to God, what he owes to his neighbour, what he owes to himself. They explain to him the great mystery of his redemption from sin and death; and in those three short, but comprehensive words, repentance, faith, and obedience, teach him what is expected from him as a Christian. They enforce all these duties by the most cogent motives and powerful sanctions. And, to add still greater weight, the whole of what is there delivered is illustrated by the most striking portraits of living virtue; that example may add energy to precept, and that speculative wisdom and practical piety may be seen, as they always should be, united.

To this word of God, therefore, let every young man go, for the guidance of his conduct in

in life. Let him weigh well its various precepts; let him study carefully its examples; let him meditate on its awful sanctions; let him lay hold of its promises; let him pray for its holy comforts and energetic assistances.—Let this, which is the first business in importance, be also the first business of life in his thoughts and attention.

But let him not, in the second place, despise or neglect the subsidiary aids of human prudence and precaution. We are not to give ourselves up, as some vainly pretend, to sudden illapses and secret illuminations. For reason, as well as revelation, is called in scripture the candle of the Lord, and the superior blaze of the one was never meant to extinguish the light of the other. And sure I am, that feebly will that virtue be guarded amidst a deceitful world, which joins not something of the wisdom of the serpent to the harmlessness of the dove.

Let the young man, therefore, who would secure his virtue, despise no aid, neglect no advantage. Is he inclined to any particular failing? Let him watch the part in which he is most vulnerable, with double diligence. Is he disposed to mirth and pleasure? Let reason ever stand as a watchful guard over imagination, to

check

check the first sallies of intemperate gaiety. Is he allured by the distinctions or honours of ambition? Let him retire sometimes from the world, and set its views at a distance: let him listen to the dictates of age, and the declarations of experience, that all is vanity. Does his heart wander from God, and incline him to wickedness? Let him frequently contemplate the various motives to early piety, and the wisdom of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth. Is he tempted to commit a small sin? Let him remember, that every sin is a transgression against a God, and that the descent of vice is slippery and dangerous. And above all, in every temptation, let him ask himself these two plain, but weighty questions:—"What is "it I am going to do? Will the pleasure of a "moment compensate for the loss of my inno"cence, the favour of my God, the peace of "my conscience, and the hope of eternal salva"tion?" Should he, after this, fall, instant repentance must succeed to his crime: for the tears of contrition can alone wash away the stains of guilt. And to the tears of a contrite, he must also add the firm resolution of a manly and christian heart; for vain and fruitless is that repentance, which mourns over past failures in conduct, but produces not a detestation and abandoning of sin.

Nor

Nor let the young Christian think it a hard or unnecessary task which is here enjoined him. For if he does not thus resolve to take heed to his ways, sin will soon gain the dominion over him, and he will soon have cause to lament the happiness from which he has fallen. He will look back with horror upon his past life, and with envy regret those days of innocence and tranquility he once enjoyed. "There was a time," he will say, when I awaked with com- "fort, and lay down in peace: yonder sun of "the morning never rose, but to light me to "new happiness; my thoughts were as chearful "as his beams: the star of the evening invited "me to undisturbed repose: for then my heart "was a stranger to care, and a foe to fraud: "my soul felt no pain; for it knew no guilt. "But now, the present hour is clouded with "anxiety, the past is armed with the stinging "reproaches of conscious guilt; and the future "comes on, arrayed in all the terrors of "vengeance and eternal despair."

Neither let the young soldier of Christ complain that the trial is too hard for him, and beyond his strength. Are his enemies strong? Heaven is on his side, and is stronger. Are his temptations powerful? The grace of God is more powerful, and will not fail him, if he does not

not first fail himself. "Ye are of God, little "children," says St. John, "and have overcome "them: because greater is he that is in you, "than he that is in the world." Do his spirits faint? Let him look up to heaven, and compare an eternity of joy with momentary sufferings. Does his faith fail? Let him view the first defenders of Christianity, who sang praises to God amidst excruciating torments and surrounding flames. Let him remember too, that his time of trial is short; that nothing is required of him but what is practicable, because it has been practised; that every conquest makes his difficulties less; and that virtue, by becoming habitual, becomes, at the same time, easy and delightful. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, "and all her paths are peace." Suffer me to add farther to this consideration, how beautiful religion appears in youthful minds and early age. Can there be a nobler sight, than to behold a young person sequestered from the follies of the world, and holding a spiritual intercourse with his Maker? Can there be a spectacle more worthy for a God himself to look down upon with pleasure, than the unaffected piety of a youthful mind, rejecting all the allurements and temptations of sense, and, in the language of Solomon, addressing himself to heaven, for that wisdom which is from above:

"O God of my fathers, and Lord of all mercy, "who hast made all things with thy word, and "ordained man through thy wisdom, that he "should have dominion over the creatures "which thou hast made, give me wisdom that "sitteth by thy throne, and reject me not from "among thy children. For I thy servant, and "son of thine handmaid, am a feeble person, "and of a short time, and too young for the "understanding of judgment and laws. O send "her out of thy holy heavens, and from the "throne of thy glory, that, being present, she "may labour with me, that I may know what "is pleasing unto thee."

How must such a sight as this eclipse the laboured finery of the proudest beauty! How must it add inexpressible charms, not only to the bloom of youth, but make even deformity itself amiable! How must it warm the anxious heart of a parent! With what a pleasing radiance must it gild the evening of his days, and make him go down in comfort to the grave of his fathers!

It would be almost too shocking to say what effect a contrary behaviour must have upon the tenderness of a parental breast. Let every dissolute and abandoned child conceive it for himself.

self. Let him reflect what it is to blast the hopes of long indulged expectation; to repay the cares of infancy with scorn and ingratitude; to wound the quiet of declining age, and bring down gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. If these thoughts are not sufficient to stop him in his career of wickedness, all that remains for the poor afflicted parent is in bitterness of heart to curse the day in which he was born; to lament that the pangs she endured at his birth were infinitely inferior to those she now feels; and, weeping over her abandoned child, to address him in the piercing language of our Saviour: "If thou hadst known, even thou, in "this thy day, the things which belong to "thy peace! but now they are hid from thine "eyes!"

You then that are just entering upon life, will do well to consider these things seriously with yourselves. Stand still, therefore, for a moment, and reflect, before you begin your course, that you may be able to run it with joy. Be assured, that much depends upon it; your own welfare here, the comfort of your friends, and, what is above all, your eternal state hereafter.

You

You are at present happy: be assured, that that happiness is the effect of your innocence. Preserve that innocence as you advance in life, and you will be happy still. But the moment you give way to guilt, you will let in a flood of cares and misery upon your souls, which will drown you in perdition.

You will find a dangerous and deceitful world to encounter. It has its smiles, and it has its frowns; it will become you, therefore, to prepare your soul for temptation in both: but neither let the one allure, nor the other terrify you, out of your integrity. Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right. Look up to the God of your fathers, and take heed to your ways, according to his word, and you have nothing to fear. He will be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempeet; his faithfulness shall be your shield and buckler.

And may the God of all mercy teach us all so to consider them, that we may in earnest apply our hearts unto wisdom; that neither the splendor of any thing that is great, nor the conceit of any thing that is good in us, may withdraw our eyes from looking upon ourselves as sinful dust and ashes; but that we may press forward to the mark of the prize of our high calling

calling in Christ Jesus our Lord, in faith and patience, in humility and meekness, in charity and self-denial; that, when this short and sinful life is ended, we may reign with God, in glory everlasting!

SERMON

SERMON XXIII.

HEBREWS xii. 2.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

IT is of all consolations, to a considerate mind, the greatest and most powerful, that there is a God in heaven that ruleth over all the jarring and distracted scenes of this lower world;—a God, without whose concurrence no power can reach us, no change or chance can befal us, and on whose goodness we may safely rely, as directing all things with an impartial hand, and for the best and most salutary purposes. And yet, in the common conduct of human life, how little do we see of that patience and resignation, which such a consideration ought to inspire! How little do we see of that lowliness of mind and submission, with which the creature ought ever to bow down before his

Creator;—of that humility and meekness, with which the dark glimmerings of human wisdom should bend to the all-surveying brightness of divine omniscience! On the contrary, we are ever attempting to fathom with the scanty line of finite knowledge, the unfathomable depths of immensity; we are ever ready to break out into the murmurs of impiety, or sink into the abyss of despair; we are ever disposed to impeach the decrees of unerring wisdom, and arraign the sentence of impartial justice; and in all the misfortunes we suffer, instead of looking up to the God of consolation with submissive eyes, and a heart full of contrition for those sins which have justly drawn down his heavy displeasure, the unfortunate are rather disposed to charge him as a hard and cruel master, who loves to sport with the unoffending work of his hands, and willingly afflicts the children of men.

"Have we not," say they, "without any "fault of ours, experienced, even from our "cradles, nothing but calamities, afflictions, "and pains? Were we not left orphans in our "infancy;—no tender mother to cherish us in "her bosom,—no prudent father to conduct "our steps through the follies of youth, and "shield our inexperience from the frauds and "allure-

" allurements of a deceitful world? And have
" we since met with any thing but crosses and
" disappointments in our lawful callings? With
" what have our industrious struggles for bread
" been rewarded, but with poverty and distress?
" Are we not made a scorn and derision to
" them that are round about us? Are not our
" most innocent expressions misrepresented by
" the poisonous tongue of calumny, and our
" most innocent actions perverted into crimes?
" Hath not God multiplied upon us sicknesses
" and infirmities; and our days, though few,
" are they not full of evil? Are not even our
" blessings turned into our misfortunes, and
" our joys into curses? The friend, that should
" have been our support, has treacherously de-
" ceived and betrayed us:—the child, whose
" beams we might have hoped should have
" gilded the evening of our days with pleasure,
" has set in darkness, never to rise again.
" Thus helpless, poor, and friendless, we bend
" towards the earth, and wait, in melancholy
" suspense, for that awful moment which shall
" bring us to the grave. What, therefore, are
" we to conclude from hence, but that God
" hath marked us out from our childhood as
" the signal objects of his heavy and unmerited
" vengeance—And if we look forwards; if we
" carry our views to another life after this,

" what better treatment can we expect at his " hands? What reason can we have to imagine " that he who hath dealt so hardly with us " here, will deal more favourably with us here- " after?"

Such, too often, is the language of the unfortunate under the afflicting hand of God.

But what weak, as well as presumptuous, reasoning is this! Thou considerest, O man, that God hath left no week of labour without its sabbath; no trial without its issue; no toil without its reward; no darkness of calamity without light sufficient to direct thee to Christ, the harbour of safety and eternal salvation.

And farther; what are all thy sufferings, be they ever so great and many, when compared with those of thy blessed Redeemer? Read his history, and be silent; "look unto Jesus, the " author and finisher of our faith," and learn patience, thou that darest to repine at the dispensations of heaven!

His first appearance was that of a helpless babe; surrounded with all the marks of infamy and neglect; exposed to all the miseries, infirmities, and sufferings of mortality: He submitted

mitted not only to be man, but even to be the least and lowest of men. The circumstances of his birth were not only void of all worldly pomp and grandeur, but even such as would naturally subject him to the scorn of the haughty, the contempt of the rich, and the derision of fools.

Though he was born a king by his office, yet mean swaddling-clothes were his imperial robes, and a manger his royal cradle. And no sooner was he born into the world, than he was doomed the victim of a tyrant's jealousy; nor could any thing less than a wretched banishment from his country deliver the helpless babe from the edge of a tyrant's sword. And after this escape, this foreboding prelude to his misfortunes, what was his whole ministry upon earth but one continued scene of hardship; nor had he frequently even where to lay his head. He was persecuted with all the combined malice of men and devils; he felt the bitter pang of being despised and rejected of his own brethren; he was buffeted, spit upon, and scourged; and, at last, closed a most miserable life by a most painful and ignominious death;—he was slain, and hanged on a tree.

Go now then, thou murmuring sinner, when thou hast answered this one question, "Why "should the servant expect to fare better than "his Lord?"—go and complain, that thy labours are ill requited;—that thou art afflicted beyond the ordinary measure of human suffering, and singled out as the passive mark of the fiery arrows of the Almighty.

Or, if you think Christ an example far above your imitation, let us descend to lower examples:—look into the history of his disciples, men, weak and frail men, like yourselves, and there seek out for a parallel to your misfortunes, and a pattern for your conduct. Yet these weak and frail men were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. These holy men had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: nay, they underwent sufferings almost shocking to the feelings of humanity to recite:—"they were stoned,—their "bodies were sawn asunder,—they were tempted, "—were slain with the sword: they wandered "about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being "destitute, afflicted, tormented: they wandered "in deserts and in mountains, and were glad "to take up their abode in the dens of wild "beasts, and the caves of the earth:" in short,

so many and so great afflictions did these holy men undergo, that, if in this life only they had hope, they were doubtless of all men the most miserable.

But instead of repining at the hard usage which they received from an ungrateful world, which they were labouring to save from eternal destruction, how wisely did they reason upon the misfortunes which befel them! They knew that afflictions were the common lot of men, and especially of the saints and faithful followers of Christ:—that their appointment was of God, and their end the benefit of man. They wisely considered them, not as the stripes of a harsh and implacable master, but the chastisements of a kind and benevolent father. They knew that they were intended to humble and purify their souls from sin; to wean their thoughts from things below, and direct them to things above, where alone true joys are to be found. They looked upon them in the light of so many proofs of their perfect resignation to the almighty will, and firm reliance on his justice and mercy, who governs all things in heaven and in earth.

And as they were thus sensible that trouble was their portion, appointed for good ends,

to make them truly happy; so did they comfort themselves with reflecting that the hands of the devil and man were tied up, so as effectually to restrain them from doing more against them than God was pleased to permit, or they were able to bear;—that the manner, measure, season, and duration of their trial, were all determined by the line of undeviating justice, according to their respective advantages;—that so long as they continued righteous and patient under their troubles, so long would they be near and dear unto God; and that he would not always be putting their virtue to these hard trials, but that their light afflictions, which was but for a moment, should in the end work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the heavens; whilst they looked not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; considering that those things which are seen are temporal, but those which are not seen are eternal.

By these solid reflections did the persecuted disciples and followers of a persecuted Redeemer comfort themselves under all their tribulation and distress. And their example is placed before us, to point out to the soul sinking under the burden of adversity, the sure, though rugged, road to everlasting bliss. Their patience and humility,

humility, in the most legible characters, direct the miserable and unhappy.—"Go, and do thou "likewise, even as they have done before thee, "in far more heavy and distressful circum- "stances: and remember this to thy consola- "tion, that though thou now, in this life, re- "ceivest evil things, yet the day will come, "when thy patience and virtue shall be re- "warded with glory and honour and immor- "tality in the life to come."

That prosperity is in itself, when rightly made use of, a very great blessing, none but a mad-man, I suppose, would pretend to dispute: and yet, when we look upon the many and fatal errors in which it too often involves those who are possessed of it, it is not very easy to determine, whether it be always for our interest to desire it. The voice of experience will tell us, that riches and grandeur too frequently incline men to put their whole confidence in themselves, and to estrange their hearts from that Supreme Being, who gave them all things richly to enjoy; and thus, instead of being a blessing, become a curse: so that however those may flatter themselves, who waste their anxious days and sleepless nights in the pursuit of earthly treasures, they little know whether they may not be pursuing that which will prove their heaviest

heaviest loss and calamity; even the loss of a valuable and immortal soul.

Indeed, were this the only state of our existence; were there no day of account to come hereafter; it were good for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good things under the sun, all the days of his life, which God giveth him; for then would this be his only portion. Upon this supposition, we could not find much to blame in the reasoning of that rich man, who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much good "laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, "drink, and be merry." For, as the Apostle argues from his own case, "if, after the manner "of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, "what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But when we are assured that after this life cometh another, wherein every man shall give an account of the talents committed to his charge; when we consider that the same Jesus, who endured patiently such contradiction of sinners against himself, is now set down at the right hand of that throne of God, before which we must all soon appear; how widely is the case then altered! And the man must be mad indeed who has this consideration in view, and yet prefers the transitory pleasures of this short

span,

span, before the unspeakable enjoyments of an everlasting futurity; nay, he must be doubly mad, who, in consideration of a few momentary snatches of imaginary bliss, can be contented to dwell with everlasting burnings. And yet such is the folly, such is the madness of every man who believes the Gospel of Christ without obeying its precepts; who is rich in this world, but is not rich towards God. Such is the man that taketh not God for his strength, but trusteth unto the multitude of his riches, and strengtheneth himself in his wickedness.

Go on then, thou son of pleasure, to rejoice in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth:—continue to walk in the ways of thine heart, and the sight of thine eyes:—but severely wilt thou one day rue the unhappy choice, and repent thy folly; for know, that for all these things, God will assuredly bring thee into judgment.—Let the wise man of this world, if he likes it, glory in his wisdom; let the mighty man of this world glory in his might; let the rich man glory in his riches: but behold! to their cost, Christ will come quickly, and his reward is with him, to give to every man according to his work: and then shall the poor and lowly of heart be comforted,

comforted, but the proud and mighty shall be mightily tormented. How, therefore, will such men, at that dread hour, say unto the mountains, fall on us; and to the rocks, cover us;—cover us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne of judgment, and from the wrath of the Lamb that was slain for us: for the great and terrible day of his wrath is come,—and who is able to abide his coming? How will they then wish, that, instead of trusting in uncertain riches, they had copied their heavenly Master's condescension and charity! How will their mean pride and vanity be put out of countenance; how will their earthly pomp and pageantry appear vile in their own eyes, when they reflect,—for they will then, alas! too late reflect,—upon the noble example of humility set them by the great Lord of heaven and earth! And yet, even then, if they have attempted it, how far must they have fallen short of reaching the glorious original! For, were the distance between the highest and lowest of men, between the king on his throne and the beggar on the dunghill;—were this distance ten thousand times greater than it really is, yet still would there be an infinitely wider difference between the greatest of mankind and the everlasting Son of God. And yet he vouchsafed to stoop down from a throne of glory, to take upon him the passions

passions and infirmities, the sufferings and mortality of his own creation;—yet this Ancient of Days, whose outgoings have been from everlasting, was wrapped in mean swaddling-clothes, and the majesty of the high and holy One laid in a manger; and all this for the sake of us poor and miserable sinners.

Hear this and blush, ye high and lofty ones of this world; who, puffed up with pride, and elated with prosperity, look down upon your fellow-creatures with contempt; as beings below your notice or regard. Learn from Him, who died to save the lowest as well as the greatest of men, that all men are equally dear to God. Let his example teach you, that no person, however high, can be debased by condescension, and that the truest and most solid honour hath its foundation in humility; and that if we would approve ourselves the servants of God, to do his pleasure, we must, like him, endeavour to promote the good of our fellow-creatures by acts of humility and charity, of kindness and forbearance, as good stewards of those good things which we have received at the hands of God.

Let us hear then the conclusion of the whole matter.—I need not tell you that we are all of

us

us heirs of mortality, and, therefore, all of us subject to those various turns of fortune, which this chequered scene of things affords. The sunshine of prosperity and the storms of misfortune, like the rain from heaven, descend alike on the just and on the unjust: we have, doubtless, each of us had our share of both already: perhaps even the present moment, little as we think of it, may be adding to the number; it may demand our gratitude for some unlooked-for blessing, or call forth our tears for some unexpected misfortune:—some happy chance, to us unknown, may now smile upon our fortunes; or, on the contrary, some heavy calamity may be ready to greet our ears with its unwelcome tidings; some distant friend may be labouring under the agonies of distress; some distant and darling child may be uttering the pang which is heard no more. These are events which are hourly taking place, and therefore are never impossible. But what lot yet awaits us in the bosom of fate, is known only to that God, whose judgments are like the great deep, and his ways past finding out:—vain, therefore, and fruitless will be our endeavours to pry into our future fortune; what that shall be, it is God's to ordain, it is our's to bear.

But

But, in the mean time, it is our duty, it is our interest, to arm our souls with patience against the various events of life. We cannot appoint the part we are to act on the stage of life, but we may be prepared to act it properly. We know not whether we shall continue to receive good or evil at the hand of God, but we may be ready to receive both with that heavenly temper which inspired that godlike sentiment into the breast of holy Job, "the Lord gave, "and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be "the name of the Lord."

Let, therefore, as many as are successful in life learn not to be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God: to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves, by acts of charity and beneficence, a good foundation, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

And let those who are afflicted in life, whether by sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity, cast their burden upon the Lord, and patiently await his all-righteous decision of their fate. Amidst all their troubles and distresses in this vale of tears, let them boldly "look "up to Jesus, the author and finisher of their

" faith; who, for the joy that was set before
" him, endured the cross, despising the shame,
" and is now set down at the right hand
" of God."

SERMON

SERMON XXIV.

PSALM xiv. Ver. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

AMID the various dangers and accidents to which human life is exposed, it seems the only true basis of consolation to a reasonable mind, that there is a God, who ruleth over all: —that nothing happens in heaven or in earth, but by his pleasure and permission; and that we may, therefore, securely rely on his wisdom, who best knows what is fitting and convenient for us.

It cannot, therefore, but seem strange, that any should be foolish enough to reject this anchor of hope, and, by denying the providence of God, expose themselves, friendless and unprotected, to the tempestuous ocean of human

life. Yet that such there have been, and still are, the Psalmist's declaration, and our own experience in this licentious age, will leave us no room to doubt. "For the ungodly is so proud "that he careth not for God, neither is God in "all his thoughts." Let us see then upon what grounds these men usually proceed, and, I trust, we shall easily discover the absurdity of their conduct, and have reason to say, with the same Psalmist, "The fool," and the fool only, "hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Now whoever renounces a Providence, and rejects God's authority over him, must do it upon one of these two principles; either through a spirit of infidelity, because he neither believes nor acknowledges such a Providence,—or else through the corruption of his heart, which will not let him submit to it, though he does believe it.

And first then, If it proceeds from a spirit of infidelity, because he does not believe a Providence, I would ask any serious man, what can be a greater folly than to deny that which is not only the most credible thing in the world, but the very foundation of all things that are credible? To deny what the most sensible heathens believed by the bare light of nature? To deny what

what has been, and can be proved by a variety of arguments, which no effrontery can contradict, no subtilty evade? And yet this is the very case of every man that denies a Providence. For first, he shuts his eyes against the very fountain of light, which is the being of a God. For the first and most immediate consequence that can be drawn from the being of a God is, that there is a Providence: he, therefore, that denies a Providence, either denies the being of a God wholly; or else, which comes to the same thing, makes him such a supine and indolent being, as takes no care of his creatures; and, therefore, can neither be just, nor wise, nor good: for all these perfections must be wanting in him, if he neglected to take care of the work of his hands: and, without these perfections, he can be no Deity. He, therefore, that denies a Providence, in fact denies the first principle and foundation of all knowledge, the being of a God. And secondly; in reality, therefore, though he may profess Christianity, such a man is worse than a heathen: for there was scarce any sect among the pagans that denied or doubted of a Providence, except those, who like the fiends of a neighbouring nation, by their abominable principles plunged men into the most diabolic practices, and whose interest, therefore, led them to wish and maintain that

there was neither God, nor law, nor rewards, nor punishments, nor Providence, nor justice, either in this world or the next; but that one eternal sleep might close together their crimes and their lives.

But farther. As it is the particular character of religion to make us hope even against hope, so he that denies a Providence becomes faithless and unbelieving against the strongest proof, the conviction of his own mind, and the conclusions of his own reason. For put the matter in other words, and we shall find him, in reality, allowing the justice and certainty of those reasonings, upon which we found the notion of a Providence. He believes that a state cannot be well governed without the wisdom and council of a prince;—that a ship cannot be safely steered without the attention and dexterity of a pilot;—that a family cannot subsist in good order without the vigilance and care of a master:—and when he sees the kingdom flourish in peace and due subordination,—the ship ride safely in the midst of contending elements,—and the family acting, in their several departments, with harmony and concord,—he concludes without hesitation, that they are severally governed by the wisdom of some intelligent being. Is it not, therefore, the flattest contradiction to his own

own reason, as well as to common sense, to suppose, that whilst these petty concerns require the guidance and wisdom of a directing hand, the vast fabric of the universe can be maintained in that wonderful order in which we see it, by chance or fate, without Providence; that is, without the care and guidance of an intelligent Being? He, therefore, that denies a Providence, must, in reality, contradict the conclusions and conviction of his own mind.

But besides all this, there are other proofs of God's care in the government of the world, against which he obstinately shuts his eyes, though they cannot escape his notice. For there is no man, I believe, that looks back upon his past life, and considers what has happened to him, but is able to call to mind either some imminent danger that he has escaped, or some extraordinary mercy that he has received; which shewed the visible care of a divine Providence over him. This the royal Psalmist long ago emphatically declared to be the case of one description of men in particular, and therefore calls upon them, in the strongest terms, to "praise the Lord for his goodness, and to "declare the wonders that he doth for the "children of men *."

* Psalm cvii.

And what is here said of those "who occupy "their business in great waters," is not less true of all men who have had an enlarged and extensive commerce in life: for the world is the great theatre and school of Providence; in which, if we are capable even of the smallest reflection, we shall soon perceive a superintending power and wisdom, which disposes of men's fates, and directs their counsels; which raiseth up and bringeth down; which maketh poor and maketh rich; which killeth and maketh alive; and, like an universal arbiter, disposeth of all events: "For the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole "disposing thereof is of the Lord." It is, therefore, wilful blindness alone, that can make any man deny the Providence of God, which so manifestly displays itself in every event of our lives.

And yet, such is the folly and inconsistency of infidelity, that these very men, who deny the care of Providence whilst the world smiles upon them, are always the first to murmur against its wise decrees when any misfortune overtakes them; being ever ready to make God the author of evil, though they will not acknowledge the good they receive from his fatherly hand.

Others

Others there are who doubt of a Providence, for those very reasons which ought more fully to convince them of it. They see the world filled with rapine and violence, and therefore conclude there is no superintending Providence to direct the actions of men. But they should consider, that these things, which proceed from the abuse of natural liberty, only become disorders as they contradict an established order; and that order is nothing but the law of Providence, which stamps a mark of infamy upon every deviation from its bounds. Thus treachery and perfidiousness are universally abhorred: and why? Because a love of integrity and upright dealing is implanted in us by a Providence. Thus theft and rapine will always be hated and disgraced, because there is a Providence, which has established a rule of right and wrong, and inspired into the breast of every man a natural sense of probity and honour, and which will not suffer its dictates to be violated, without the stings of remorse, shame, and confusion. And thus every irregularity in the moral world, as contradicting an established law, implanted in the breasts of all men, plainly supposes and implies the existence of a Providence, by which that law was first implanted.

Such then is the folly of those who renounce the belief of a Providence, through a spirit of infidelity! Let us, in the next place, see whether they are wiser who do indeed profess to believe a Providence, but, through a spirit of corruption, reject its authority, and have not God in all their thoughts.

It is an undeniable truth, which serves to give us an exalted idea of the Deity, that God would be no God to us, if we could enjoy any solid happiness without him. This, therefore, is a convincing proof that he is our ultimate end and chief good, and that we make ourselves miserable the moment we forsake him. And this, in fact, we every day see verified in those who throw off their dependence upon God, and follow their own corrupt imaginations.

Paint to your imaginations a ship in the midst of the wide ocean, buffeted by the winds and waves, without compass to guide, or pilot to steer its course: such is the man who, in the great voyage of the world, is without God as the rule of his conduct, and the support of his weakness. For when he has once renounced the protection of Providence, upon what can he depend, or whither shall he fly? Will he depend upon himself for support? Alas! there he will find

find but small comfort. Let him first well weigh, on the one hand, the snares with which he is beset, the dangers with which he is surrounded, and the enemies with which he is assaulted; and, on the other, the treachery of his own heart, and the general infirmity of nature, by turns overwhelmed with fear, depressed with sorrow, inflamed with revenge, devoured with pride, transported with lust, embittered by disappointment; let him well weigh these melancholy concomitants of human life, and he will find little reason to fly to himself for succour. The solitary traveller, exposed to the dangers of a pathless wilderness, amidst the horrors of midnight, without any guide to direct his wandering steps;—the captive exile, expiring under the complicated miseries of darkness, famine, and disease, without hope of relief, and without one friend to cheer his fainting soul;—afford but a faint picture of the wretchedness of man left to himself with God and his Providence.

Should he, therefore, conscious of his own weakness, fly for help to others, let him learn, from the mouth of wisdom itself, what he is to expect from that quarter: "For cursed is the "man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh "his arm, and whose heart departeth from the "Lord."

"Lord." And saith not every day's experience the same? For what can be a greater curse than trust for our support in man?

Or what can be a greater wretchedness than a servile dependence on the favour of the great and opulent? To stand, like Tantalus *, with burning lips, amidst streams which we are forbidden to taste;—to grasp, with extended hands, at pleasures which we can never reach;—to sacrifice our understanding to the man we despise;—to watch the nod of folly, or court the smiles of ignorance;—to echo back the aphorisms of dullness, or reflect the grin of conceit;—to bear the insults of pride with awe, and the injuries of oppression with tameness;—and, after all, perhaps, to be capriciously deprived of our hopes, without just cause or pretence:—these are miseries which would extort from meekness itself the feeling apostrophe of the poet,

"Turn thy complexion thence, Patience, thou young and rose-lip'd cherubim."

Should you doubt of this, ask those who have put their trust in the arm of flesh, and they will readily own that their condition is truly miserable and horrid. This is the best of their condition, even when fortune smiles upon them,

* Vide Rambler.

and

and they meet with no obstacles to their success. But when, after all their worldly policy and wisdom, some cross accident intervenes, to baffle their designs, and confound their devices;—when they see themselves forgotten, despised, and neglected by those in whom they trusted;—when they look back with shame upon their own base compliances and unmanly servilities;—then do they truly feel the bitterness of that curse which the prophet denounces against those that put their trust in man, and depart from the living God; then would they willingly change their plan, and fly for protection to that Providence, which was not before in all their thoughts. But, unhappy men! as they insulted over God in their prosperity, so will he refuse to hear them in the day of their distress. They would not own him as a Father, they will, therefore, now feel him as a Judge: he will justly ask them, in the language of scripture, "Where "now are their gods, their rock in whom they "trusted? Let them rise up and help you, and "be your protection." These were the gods of your prosperous days, in whom ye trusted, neglecting my power and fatherly care; apply, therefore to them in your adversity, and, if they are able, let them save you and deliver you out of my hand.

But

But how different is the situation of the man who is able to say, with the noble confidence of the apostle, "I know in whom I have believed, "and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep "that which I have committed unto him!" Wherever I am, or whatever I do, I know that I am still under the watchful care of God's Providence, which is able to preserve me from all dangers. And though sometimes his footsteps are hid in darkness, and his ways past finding out, I will yet acquiesce in his dispensations, nor pretend with mortal eye to measure the heights of infinity. He is a God, I am but a worm: is it, therefore, to be wondered at, that I cannot always discover the reasons of his administration? But my past experience of his mercy and protection, and the general harmony apparent in the government of the world proclaim him wise, and just, and good. I will, therefore, submit to his will with reverence: "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him "good." If his Providence scatters the blessings of life around me, I will receive them with thankfulness: if it rains down afflictions upon me, I will bear them with submission: in every event of life, mine shall be the humble language of Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath "taken away, blessed be the name of the "Lord."

May

May this holy spirit be in the breast of every one that heareth me this day! May we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, with all our might, and with all our strength! May his will be done in earth, as it is in heaven! May all the scattered nations of the world acknowledge his kingdom, and adore his power! May the lowest look up to him with confidence and comfort: for he is the friend of the friendless, the comforter of the poor and needy. And may the highest bow down to him with submissive fear and filial reverence: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; he is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

SERMON

SERMON XXV.

PSALM CXXXVII. 5, 6.

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

THIS psalm is, with great reason, supposed to be the composition of a Jewish Levite, after the return from the Babylonish captivity, though the great oracle of infidelity, Voltaire, ignorantly ascribes it to David, who was dead four hundred years before the event: and the afflicted author most pathetically describes in it the calamities and indignities which his countrymen suffered during that long and unfortunate period. There is something singularly affecting, as well as truly poetical, in the exordium of it.—"By the rivers of Babylon;" on the solitary banks of the Euphrates, which we were compelled to inhabit; that we might give the freer vent to our sorrows, being unable to yield thee any other testimony of our affection, "we sat down and wept when we remembered

"thee,

" thee, O Sion;" when we compared thy former glory and prosperity with the low and deplorable state to which thou wast then fallen. As for our harps, having now no farther call for them, either for our own amusement, or for the solemn services of the temple, we hanged them upon the willows which overspread the banks, that they might be so many sad mementos of the happiness we had lost, and that they might not be profaned at the pleasure of our impious tyrants. " For there, they that carried us away captive," the destroyers of Jerusalem, the authors of all our grief and misery, most insultingly required of us mirth in our sorrow, and melody in our heaviness:—" Come," said they, " sing us one of the songs of Sion;" one of those sacred hymns which you used to sing in the temple of your God. Ye absurd, ye impious tyrants! " how shall we sing the Lord's " song in a strange land?"—Ye may fetter and enslave our captive bodies, but ye cannot bend or debase our free-born souls to servile compliance. How, think ye, can we celebrate the worship of our God in any other place than that which He himself has appointed? Can ye expect those songs of praise and thanksgiving, which were composed in honour of the great Jehovah, the God of Israel, to be vilely prostituted to the followers of Baal, and the wor-

shippers of stocks and stones? No; "if I "forget thee, O Jerusalem," and the desolations brought upon thee by these cruel oppressors, "let my right-hand forget her cunning: if I "do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave "to the roof of my mouth." May I from that moment be deprived of my sweetest delight! May my tongue lose all its powers of melody, and my right-hand be unable to touch the harp with its accustomed skill! May this and much more befal me, if ever I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy; if the love of thee, my country, ever ceases to be the ruling passion of my soul.

From the words of the text thus opened and introduced, I shall make some short remarks upon the love of our country; a subject to which our attention is naturally called, both from our present situation, and from a view of those horrors and calamities of a neighbouring kingdom, by which religion, royalty, public and private order have fallen a sacrifice to desperate anarchy and lawless fury. To love our country, a duty here so strongly recommended by this poor Jew, is a fixed disposition to promote the safety, welfare and honour of the community in which we were born, and the constitution under which we are protected: and, therefore, such a love is a necessary consequence of our loving our best

friends, our parents, children, and even ourselves; since neither they nor we can be safe and happy, but under a safe and happy government. Indeed the love of our country, like self-love, may be said to be a sort of native instinct; something which is interwoven and congenial with the first principles of our very nature; so that what the great Roman orator says of the law of self-defence against unjust violence, may justly be applied to the love of our country: "That it is not a written law, "but one which was born with us: that it is "not derived from tradition, books, or instruc- "tion, or from any other source than that of "nature itself; and that it is coeval with our "very being *." And, therefore, it can be no matter of wonder that this passion is the growth of every climate. Thus those who dwell amidst continual frosts and snow, and those who enjoy the warm and cheering sunshine; the inhabitants of the barren desert, and the occupants of fruitful fields; the sons of liberty, and the slaves of arbitrary power, do all alike agree in an unalterable affection to their native country, and in preferring it to every other in the world. Nay, there are various instances recorded of those, who, after being rescued from the vilest debasement and barbarity of which human nature is

* Cicero pro Milone.

capable,

capable, and having been instructed in the arts and manners of humanity, and tasted the sweets and comforts of civilized life, have yet with the greatest eagerness seized the first opportunity of quitting them, and returning to the filth and brutishness in which they were born and educated.

But then, though the love of their country be a passion thus common to all men, yet it exerts itself in a very different manner in men of different characters and situations. In those of liberal minds, and who have lived under a free and happy constitution, it is displayed in acts of the brightest zeal, the clearest courage, and the most disinterested affection; in one word, in every genuine exertion of greatness of soul and goodness of heart. But in others it is nothing more than a blind and senseless passion, making no distinction betwixt trifles and things of the utmost importance, and breaking out into such excesses as neither reason nor humanity will warrant.—A multitude of examples to confirm the truth of what has been now asserted, may be produced from both ancient and modern history: for there we may meet with repeated instances of men, who have continued their best services to the public even under the hardest and most ungrateful treatment; and

again of others who have sacrificed all the comforts of life, and even life itself, to the good of their country, and whose expiring breath has been spent in the most fervent wishes for its safety and prosperity. But I chuse to insist on such instances only of this heroic virtue as are to be met with in the historical parts of the Old and New Testament. In the former, we read of Moses, the great lawgiver of the Jews, who had such a tender affection for his people, that when by their sins they had provoked God's heavy wrath against them, he begs of the Lord that he would rather cut him off by an untimely death, than suffer him to survive and behold the destruction of his nation.

Of Eli, the high priest, it is recorded, that, upon hearing that the ark of God was taken by the enemy, he fell down suddenly and died, unable to survive the departure of the glory from Israel.

There is a passage in the second book of Kings, which, as an excellent critic has well observed, wants only a place in some polite author of Greece or Rome to have been universally admired and celebrated. It is this.—Hazael being sent by his master, the king of Syria, on a message to the prophet Elisha, it is said, that as soon as

as he came into the presence of the prophet, "Elisha settled his countenance stedfastly upon "him, until he was ashamed;" till Hazael was in some confusion; whilst, at the same time, the tears were hastily dropping from the eyes of Elisha. And Hazael, astonished at so unexpected a sight, said, "Why weepeth my lord?" The prophet answered, in language which we have seen realized in a neighbouring nation, "Because I know the evil that thou wilt do "unto the children of Israel: their strong holds "wilt thou set on fire, and their young men "wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash "their children, and rip up their women with "child.—And Hazael said, But what, is thy "servant a dog that he should do this great "thing?"—How shall a mean and despicable creature, such as thy servant, who is no better than a dog, have the power to do all these things?—The prophet answered, "Thou art now "indeed mean, and the subject and servant of "a king; but the Lord hath shewed me that "thou thyself shalt be a king over Syria."

Not much unlike this is what we meet with in the behaviour of Nehemiah, who was one of the captive Jews in Babylon; and who, notwithstanding the riches and honours he there enjoyed, and the high favour in which he stood

with the king, had a settled gloom upon his mind and visage: and upon the king's asking why his countenance was so sad, he ingenuously answered, "Why should not my countenance "be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' "sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof "are consumed with fire?"

In the New Testament, besides the many instances of the love of their country shewn by his disciples and followers, particularly by St. Paul, there is a very remarkable one of Christ himself: for we read, that when, upon his way to Jerusalem, he was come so near as to command a view of the whole place, he stopped short, and attentively beheld the city; he fixed his eyes on it with a mournful and melancholy silence, sadly reflecting on the dreadful judgments of God ready to fall upon it; till at last, to ease the bitter anguish of his soul, he wept over it, and broke forth into this affectionate expostulation, saying, "If thou hadst known, "even thou at least in this thy day, the things "which belong unto thy peace! but now they "are hid from thine eyes."

And yet, notwithstanding this illustrious example, which must have the greatest weight and influence with all real Christians; and notwithstanding

standing that universal benevolence which is made the test of a Christian, it has been ridiculously asserted by a noble writer and his ignorant followers, that the love of our country, as well as private friendship, are purely voluntary duties, a sort of works of supererogation in a Christian, being no where enjoined in the Gospel of Christ. It certainly is true, that there is no direct or express precept to be found there for either of these duties: but what occasion was there for such a precept, after so express a command to love all mankind without distinction, even our very enemies not being excepted?

Indeed it may with the greatest justice be affirmed, that the christian law, by commanding us to love even our enemies, has thereby carried the duties of friendship and of the love of our country to the highest perfection of which they are capable: For what an ardent, what an overflowing affection must that man have for his country and his friend, the supports as well as sources of so many comforts to him in life, who can even pardon the tongue that insults, can forgive the hand that smites, can bless the enemy that persecutes, and, in imitation of his divine Master, pray for the very murderer, whose ruffian violence deprives him of life?

Having endeavoured to establish the general duty of the love of our country, I shall now proceed to consider the particular reasons and motives which we have to love our own.

Now these arise from the peculiar blessings and privileges which we enjoy in it. In the first place, we have the happiness to live in a country which abounds with all the necessary supports and substantial comforts of human life; and these, in general, more various and excellent in their kind, than are to be met with in any other part of the known world. And though it cannot boast of the settled seasons, the azure skies, the bright warm sunshine, the delicious fruits of some more southern climates; yet let it be remembered, that neither are we, on the other hand, subject to their scorching heats, their ferocious animals and venomous reptiles, nor to their frequent and horrible alarms and devastations from earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanoes.

Again: Our situation as an island is of all the most desirable, not only for the advantage it affords us of carrying on a most extensive commerce, but also for the security it gives us against the attempts of our foreign enemies. And to this, under God, it is owing that England has never

never been, for many centuries past, the seat of war with a foreign enemy; a consideration which cannot but at this time very sensibly affect every Englishman, and make him applaud his own good fortune, when he contemplates the dreadful scenes of complicated misery which have lately desolated the now dismembered provinces of the British empire in America, or the still more dreadful scenes of bloodshed and barbarity which now overspread the Gallic empire.

But what should above all engage our affection to our country is the excellency of its constitution, under which our lives and property, and what should be as dear to every man as either of these, our liberties, both civil and religious, are secured to us by the strongest guards and fences, which the wisdom of man, aided by long experience, could devise or effect. A man who is not ready both to do and suffer any thing for the safety and prosperity of such a country, can have nothing that is good or great in him. His heart must be a stranger to every social and humane affection, and leanness must have entered deep into his soul:—He must be unaffected with shame and reproach, regardless of posterity, utterly void of all sentiments of gratitude, and either an enemy or a stranger to his own true interest; for every man's true interest is intimately

mately connected with the public good. And for this reason * a great Athenian patriot, when his countrymen were repining and murmuring at the losses they had suffered in carrying on a long and fatal war, very justly called upon them to be more attentive to the public calamities, than to any thing which had befallen themselves; telling them, that of the two it was much better for individuals to live under a prosperous state, though they were at the same time unfortunate as individuals, than to enjoy the greatest good fortune under a distressed and declining one: since, whilst the public continued safe and flourishing, private men had many resources left, by which they might repair their losses; whereas let any individual be as great and happy as his heart can wish, with all his greatness he must be finally involved and irrecoverably lost in the common fall and ruin of his country.

I shall endeavour, thirdly, to point out the manner and effects in which the love of our country is to shew itself.

Now there is nothing more talked of, nothing more universally professed by all parties, than the love of our country; so that were we to at-

* Thucyd. Lib. II. Pericles orat.

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tend only to mens' verbal declarations, we must conclude ourselves to be a nation of patriots, where there are no selfish, no narrow-spirited politicians to be met with, no not one. But as mens' actions and general tenor of conduct are much more expressive of their real characters than their words, it will always be easy to distinguish the real from the pretended patriot.

In general it may be said, that the love of our country, if it be sincere, will be displayed in the same effects as the love of our dearest friends; that is, in most devoutly wishing it all increase of glory and happiness, and contributing cheerfully our best services to its safety and prosperity: and consequently the instances of this affection in individuals will be as various as their abilities and situations in life.

Magistrates and governors have a very extensive sphere of action; and the higher is their rank and authority, the greater are the opportunities they enjoy of manifesting their sincere affection to their country; for they have the power both of introducing and establishing all those laws, customs, and institutions, which are the stability of public happiness, and of preventing or abolishing all such as are destructive of it. By their prudent and equitable distribu-

tion

tion of rewards and punishments, they take the surest method to make every man do his duty to his country, and so to have the public service carried on in the best and most effectual manner.

Inferior magistrates have a very plain track chalked out for them, by following which they will give the best proof of their real patriotism; and that is, by faithfully discharging the trusts committed to them, in an impartial administration of justice, and a due exertion of the laws upon all seditious and turbulent offenders; since nothing can contribute more to the internal peace and happiness of any community, than the restraining the excesses of lawless and desperate combinations of men, and giving a free and vigorous course to truth and justice.

Those who are in private stations will meet with frequent opportunities of manifesting their love for their country, by employing the several abilities and means which Providence has given them, to the best advantage for its service; for example, in removing, as far as they are able, all obstructions to a regular course of law and justice; in promoting all well-digested plans for public utility; in encouraging a spirit of industry and sobriety within their sphere of action and influence; in doing what they can to relieve the

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wants and soften the distresses of the unfortunate, and by every act of humanity and benevolence to their countrymen and fellow-christians. —And even those of the lowest class amongst us may likewise deserve the name of Patriots, by their orderly behaviour and due submission to lawful authority; by strictly observing the Apostle's direction of studying to be quiet, and to do their own business, and, as far as in them lies, to live peaceably with all men.

And, lastly, all men in general may be entitled to this truly honourable appellation by a proper attention to the duties of their several stations and professions, and by keeping at a distance from all those vices which have a more immediate tendency to the ruin of any community; and more especially by observing such a prudent œconomy in their own expences, as may secure them from the infection of that luxury, which prevails so universally, that we see all ranks of men rashly advancing into the place of those who stood before them; a folly, which, by the experience of many ages, has been found to be no less pernicious to the public than to individuals; a folly, which is destructive of all subordination, extinguishes every good and generous principle, rendering every man a necessitous dependent, and therefore capable of any wickedness,

ness, however odious or contemptible; in one word, the natural parent of the traitor and the slave.

But, above all, we shall most effectually declare our love for our country by a steady and uniform practice of every social virtue, and by displaying in our lives and conversations all that greatness of soul and goodness of heart, which constitute the character of the true Christian: for then we may hope, that as we have long been the happiest nation under heaven, so this our happiness may be still more and more improved and secured to us; that the sword of the Lord may at last rest and be still, and that our eyes may once more behold the blessing of peace; that God, out of great mercy to us, will prolong the days of our most gracious Sovereign to their utmost extent, in order that all the blessed fruits, which may reasonably be expected from such an illustrious patron and example of virtue and piety, may take effect, and be fully established among us. Finally, that we may always be a chosen people to the Lord, and may always have the Lord for our God.

SER-

SERMON XXVI.

LUKE xvi. 20, 21, 22.

And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.—And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

THAT virtue should be rewarded and vice punished, is certainly no less agreeable to the feelings of nature than it is to the dictates of reason. One cannot help, therefore, expressing a secret complacency and approbation in the picture which is here exhibited to our view; one cannot help rejoicing to see this poor caitiff relieved from the miseries of distressed mortality, and rewarded with the joys of heaven in Abraham's bosom.

We are not, however, to imagine that these joys were the reward of his poverty, but rather of

of his virtue and integrity. For as the rich man in the parable was not doomed to hell because he was rich, but because he was wicked; so neither was the poor man carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom because he was poor, but because he was good and virtuous; because he bore his poverty with patience and resignation to God's will.

Indeed, in general, we should form very wrong estimates of things, were we to judge of the dispositions of mens hearts by the difference of their conditions in life. For as religion is not inconsistent with riches, so neither is it always found in a state of poverty. Corruption steals into all conditions of life, and infects the low as well as the high. The same destructive passions too appear under different forms, and possess the hearts of the poor as well as the rich. A man may be saved or lost in all conditions, for all have their temptations; and happy is he only who knows how to avoid them, and has the resolution to do his duty in whatsoever sate of life it has pleased God to place him.

I shall, therefore, take occasion from the character here given of Lazarus, to point out what are the proper qualifications of that virtuous poverty which intitle a man to the favour of God, and

and to be rewarded with everlasting happiness in Abraham's bosom.

And 1st, We are certainly to exclude from the number of the virtuous poor, those who have brought poverty upon themselves by their vices or indiscretion.

It is the fashion of the present age for every one to appear at least to the full extent of his circumstances. The wise frugality of our ancestors is lost and derided. Our men of business are transformed into men of pleasure, and endeavour to rival, or even outdo, patrician extravagance in dress, equipage, gaming, luxury, and other worse vices. And hence arise those fatal blows which are so frequently and so heavily felt in the commercial world. Hence arise those deplorable failures, which entail beggary not only upon themselves and their children, but too often upon many innocent families, who have unhappily been connected with such unthinking prodigals. And shall we call this a virtuous poverty, which arises from such sources? No, rather it is a poverty which carries with it blacker guilt than that of the open robber or midnight felon. Let such men therefore be assured that it must cost them many a penitential tear before they

can be entitled either to the character or reward of the poor but virtuous Lazarus.

2dly, We are only to reckon those among the number of the deserving poor who are really in want, and are also incapable of relieving their distresses themselves. For it is a secret, I presume, to no one, that there are many infamous impostures, who only counterfeit poverty, and cover themselves with rags and sores, the better to extort relief from well-disposed Christians. There are others too who are indeed in real want, but who are so through choice: they love idleness better than work, and rather chuse to beg, than to procure an honest living by the labour of their hands. These are they that snatch the bread of charity out of the mouths of the industrious poor: these are they that swarm in our streets, that besiege the gates of the rich, and weary every passenger with their cries for relief; which if denied, they immediately exclaim against the coldness of charity, and the barbarity of the world. I would not willingly be thought to plead against charity in any shape, and therefore I will not too severely condemn those, who, through a well-meant zeal, relieve such objects as these. But I cannot help saying, that, in my judgment, they would shew themselves much wiser men, and better friends

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to the community, by not encouraging a tribe of vagrants, who will neither labour to provide for themselves, nor submit to that provision which the legislature has amply made for them.

But there are, the more is the pity! there are too many also among us, who are real objects of our compassion; who are truly poor, and whom nothing but urgent necessity, and an incapacity of supporting themselves, and sometimes even hardly that, can compel to solicit relief. Such, for instance, are the weak and decrepit, who are past their labour by old age or infirmities. Such again are those who are burthened with numerous families, widows, orphans, and industrious workmen, who, through want of employment, or from sickness, languish under affliction and poverty: and perhaps above all they are objects of our compassion, who, from a flourishing condition, are reduced to poverty by misfortunes. Certain it is, that poverty is heavy enough to all: but when it falls to the lot of those who have seen better days, whose bodies have been unused to manual labour, and whose souls have been trained to more generous and refined sentiments, it must surely be doubly heavy. It must cost them many a hard struggle to break through the strong feelings of modesty; it must cost them many a deep sigh, before they can think of becoming troublesome

some to their friends; it must cost them many an anxious tear, before they can submit to ask that assistance for themselves, which they have, perhaps, long been accustomed to give to others. Yet doubtless many such unhappy, though virtuous objects, there are in the world: so inscrutable are thy ways, O eternal providence, and thy judgments past finding out!

3dly, We may add, that one that is truly poor ought to have discretion enough to be contented when his real wants are supplied, and he is furnished with what is necessary. Some regard indeed may be had to a man's former condition, and there ought to be a difference between one that was born poor, and one that is reduced to poverty from a higher station. But then this difference ought to be made by him that gives the charity, and not by him that receives it. An inspired apostle says, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." And if this holds true for all Christians in general, it still more especially concerns the poor, of what condition soever they are, or may have been in better days. It is their duty to conform themselves to that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, and to learn to be content with such things as they have, for this is a part of their trial. We find that the virtuous Lazarus aimed

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not at the luxuries of life; he requested no more than the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

We may observe, 4thly, That how poor soever Lazarus was, yet he had not recourse to unlawful means to support himself. When Agur, in the Old Testament, requested God to keep him from poverty, he gives this reason for it, "Lest," says he, "I be poor and steal." And, I fear, there are but too many indigent persons who fall under this temptation, which is one of the most dangerous rocks to which poverty is exposed. Many are ashamed to beg, who are not afraid to steal; and though, perhaps, they do it not openly, for fear of falling into the hands of justice, yet they pilfer and defraud in private, are addicted to lying and hypocrisy, and are guilty of many unjustifiable arts to excite the pity of well disposed persons. These are vices but too common among the poor: yet let me not be thought to charge them upon all. There are some, and I would hope many, who, rather than offend their consciences by these base arts, would chuse to bear the greatest miseries, and patiently suffer hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness, with a contented mind, as knowing that it is the will of God that it should be so. And happy sure are they, who, amidst all the dis-

tresses they feel, can thus look up to God, the rock of ages, and commit their souls into the hands of their Creator, without staining them with the filth of those sins which would bar their entrance into the kingdom of the just. May they ever retain these good resolutions, knowing that their light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the heavens.

5thly, We must not forget the duty of humility, which is indeed necessary for all Christians, but more especially for those whom God has called to a state of poverty and dependence. For, though pride be odious enough in whatever state it appears, or from whatever cause it proceeds, yet we can bear it with some patience in men of exalted stations: but when it is the companion of rags, it is insufferable. A proud poor man is a monstrous composition, which must ever excite indignation here, and, what is worse, will suffer God's vengeance hereafter: for he who does not learn to humble his soul under the afflicting hand of God, loses one of the chief ends for which God sends so severe a chastisement upon him, and therefore must also lose that reward in heaven which belongs only to the meek and lowly in heart.

6thly,

6thly, Patience is another duty which is incumbent upon the poor. And in this Lazarus will afford them a noble example: for his patience was as exemplary as his sufferings were great. He was, amidst all his misery, denied so small a relief as the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; and yet he bore it without one murmur or complaint. It is hard indeed to want the necessaries of life, to suffer hunger and be full of sores; and it is still harder, if in this condition we are forsaken by those from whom we might expect assistance, and, instead of moving compassion, are loaded with denials, reproaches and contempt: yet, though religion allows us to feel such evils as these, at the same time it teaches us to turn them to our spiritual advantage. By calamities we should learn to strengthen our piety, and raise our thoughts from this afflicting scene to that better country, where all tears shall be wiped away. Instead of repining at God's providence, we should learn humbly to adore his ways, and chearfully receive the bitter cup he has given us to drink. We should say, with the submission of old Eli, "It "is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him "good." Or with the Psalmist, "I became "dumb, and opened not my mouth; for it was "thy doing." We should remember, that all things work together for good to them that love

God, and that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Such were the considerations by which the holy men of old were enabled to smile amid the flames and tortures of their worst enemies. And by them may we also subdue the bitterest pangs of distress, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

7thly, To patience we must add a full trust in God, and a firm reliance upon his providence. And we may rest assured, that he who feeds the ravens, clothes the lilies of the field, and brings forth grass for the cattle, will not forget his children. "Take no anxious thought there-"fore, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall "we drink, or wherewithal shall we be cloathed? "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye "have need of all these things." Instead, therefore, of trusting in man, in God be your only hope. His eyes are over the righteous, and his ears open unto their prayers. "Fear "not then, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of "Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord thy "Redeemer, and the Holy One of Israel;" he will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able: he will either deliver you by unexpected means, or strengthen you by his grace to bear your sufferings. And let them be ever

so great, ye know that they cannot be very lasting: death will soon be at hand, which will put an end to all your cares and sorrows, if ye be virtuous, and ye shall finally rest with Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

Lastly, An indifference to the things of this world is of great use to us in adversity. For did we rightly consider that we here walk among shadows, and that all is vanity, we should be less solicitous about earthly enjoyments, and turn our thoughts more earnestly to heaven, where alone true joys are to be found. For though we are deprived of what are commonly esteemed the blessings of life, yet what are all these, wealth, honours, dignity, and fame, about which mankind are making this endless bustle, to which they sacrifice their present ease, and too often their future hopes? What are they, if rightly estimated, but the gilded toys, which the blind, capricious hand of fortune scatters at random, and again can snatch from us at every hour? And though we have not these, we may have blessings of a much nobler nature: we may have honesty and a good conscience, which riches cannot give; we may have religion and God's grace, which power cannot take away. And if we are truly possessed of these, we need

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not envy the treasures of misers, nor the splendor of kings.

Such then are the virtues which ought to adorn a state of poverty and affliction. Let those, therefore, who hope to partake of the reward of Lazarus, first learn to practise his virtues. Let them examine themselves, whether they are rich towards God, whether they are fruitful in good works, and adorned with a sincere and well-grounded piety. Can they, like him, suffer a denial without murmuring and repining? Are they diligent in their callings, and willing to use their best endeavours to avoid being troublesome to the public? Are they peaceable in their families, and free from those domestic quarrels which are too often found in the retreats of poverty? Do they frequent the worship of God in public, and live in his holy fear in private? Do they endeavour to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and both by precept and example instil into their minds a love of labour, and of the virtues of humility, patience, and resignation; to the exercise of which their lowly station will more particularly call them? If they are really in this heavenly frame and temper of mind, happy are they amindst all the evils which can befal them: for though they now struggle

struggle with sin, sorrow, and infirmity, though they now sow in tears, yet the time will soon come when they shall reap with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

As to those whom providence has placed in a higher station, and whose lot is in a fair ground, let them from hence learn not to despise any man for the lowness of his condition; neither virtue nor abilities are confined to the higher ranks of life. There is still many a pious, though despised Lazarus, laid at our gates; and many a man now toils at the oar, or drudges in the streets, who might have been, with proper cultivation, a Newton in science, or a Tillotson in eloquence. Even the Saviour of mankind himself condescended to be born in a manger, and always appeared in a meek and low condition, not having even where to lay his head: and who then but a madman would dare to despise that lowness of birth and humility of station, which his God and his Redeemer thought it no disgrace to assume.

Let them also learn hence, not to be puffed up with the greatness of their own condition. Soon will all these distinctions cease, and the head of the monarch lie on the same level with that of the beggar; and then, not all the

pageantry of funeral pomp, not all the parade of titles, not all the boasted panegyries of lying monuments, will avail any thing at the bar of heaven. Nay, what is worse, the greater their trust has been, the heavier also will be their account. Little reason then have they to be puffed up with wealth or greatness, which imply no real worth in themselves, which will soon be lost in the grave, where all things are forgotten, and which may in the end only serve to aggravate their condemnation. It was wealth and greatness which brought the rich man to beg in vain for a drop of water to cool his tongue.

Let them further learn from hence, that the virtuous poor are the objects of God's care, and therefore ought also to be the objects of theirs; who are no more than the stewards of God's blessings. It will therefore become them, in imitation of his benevolence, to be fathers to the fatherless, and protectors to the widows; to feed the hungry and cloath the naked; to support those who are sinking into distress, and to rescue those from temptation, who are already fallen into it; to contribute to the education of the young, and the instruction of the ignorant; in short, to relieve the wants of their souls and bodies, by those several methods which every one will easily find, who is sincerely disposed

disposed to promote the glory of God, and the happiness of man.

Lastly, Since all of us have our afflictions in life, let us all learn, from this example of Lazarus, to bear them with patience and resignation to the will of God. We cannot appoint the part we are to act in life; but we should be prepared to act it properly. Let us, therefore, arm our souls with patience against the various events we may encounter, and, amidst the changes and chances of this mortal life, look forwards to that better country, where no clouds of affliction are seen, where no storms of adversity are heard, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest with virtuous Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

SERMON

SERMON XXVII.

JOHN ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

THERE cannot, perhaps, be a more awful idea conveyed to the mind of man, than that which is suggested to us in these words. Yet, awful as it is, it seems but to make little impression on our minds and actions. We all of us well know that our night is coming: we have daily monitors around us to warn us of its certain approach: its black curtain successively drops over our dearest friends, and dooms us to a long and painful separation from them; yet neither precept nor warning are able to teach us to number our days, and apply our hearts to wisdom. We know that our night is coming, and that the journey of life must be performed whilst

whilst it is yet day, yet we foolishly linger by the way: we make idle excursions into the fields of fancy or the regions of amusement; we waste our moments in cropping the rose-buds of pleasure: we crown ourselves with the garlands of folly, and dance along the road of life, as thoughtless and unconcerned as the decorated lamb in the pagan sacrifices of old, which knew not that his gaudy trappings only destined him to the bloody knife of the slayer.

But let us awake to the sober voice of reason, and listen to the dictates of heavenly wisdom. To many of us the day is far spent, and the night is at hand: to all of us the continuance of the light of life is a matter of the greatest uncertainty, and our sun may be set in darkness, before to-morrow's light shall gild the bright chambers of the morning.

This awful approach of night may be considered as a warning to us, both with respect to the business of the present life, and the concerns of the next.

If we consider it as designed to teach us wisdom with respect to the present life, it seems to speak to every man in some such language as this:

"Remember,

"Remember, child of mortality, that the "night is coming, when no man can work: "whatever, therefore, be thy province in life, "or whatever thy situation, discharge the duties "of it with care and fidelity. Form not idle "schemes of future happiness or possible ad- "vantage, but employ the present moment "well. Let not life glide away insensibly in "torpidity or indifference, but call forth all "thy powers to their proper use. Every day "brings its peculiar task, which, if neglected, "is doubled on the succeeding day; and perhaps "that succeeding day may never arrive to "thee. Nor vainly imagine, that any rank "or degree can exempt thee from the duties of "humanity: all are necessary in some way "or other, and must contribute their share to "the movement of the great machine of the "world."

The employments indeed of life are as various as the changes and chances of it: some are doomed to more painful scenes, the labour of the body and the hardships of animal suffering: others to the cultivation of the mind, and its several powers, in speculative industry: to some are delegated the reins of power: to others are trusted the stores of affluence. But all have many duties which they owe to themselves, and

many, which they owe to others; and, therefore, all are required to be active and diligent in their several stations, and to fulfil their destined task, before the night approacheth.

Is any man, for example, called to servile employ, to toil for others? It is his duty to labour with chearfulness for the support of himself and the benefit of the public. And though he may earn his bread with the sweat of his brow, yet let him not repine: it will be sweeter to him, if eaten with a contented heart, than all the delicacies of pampered luxury. Should he sometimes think it hard to toil in the vale of obscurity, let him remember that he is treading in the footsteps of his Saviour, who was lowly and of no reputation, and that his station is the appointment of a wise God, who ordereth all things in number, weight, and measure. And though others may have many blessings which he wants, yet he is also free from many inconveniences to which they are subject. He is exempt from the dangerous snares of ambition, which lead thousands into anxiety and ruin: he has no tedious hours of indolence to sour his temper: he has no constitution shattered by intemperance and nocturnal revels, to bring misery upon himself, and entail it upon his posterity: in a word, he may have the comfort of

of competence and a good conscience here, and be eternally happy hereafter. It becomes him, therefore, to discharge the duties of his humble station with chearfulness, modesty, and diligence. Is any man free from the necessity of bodily labour? Still let him not think himself privileged to do nothing, or, what is worse, to do evil.—The very insect that flutters in the sunshine for a few moments, has its peculiar task allotted by infinite wisdom: surely, therefore, an immortal nature cannot be left without its proper destination. His work, indeed, is different from that of the necessitous, but his duty is equal. For the more leisure he has from bodily toil, though Providence has wisely made some degree of that necessary for every man, the more he is bound to improve his mind in knowledge and virtue.

Nor let him think his task either easy or trifling. Knowledge is of great value, and therefore is not to be attained without proportionate labour. It does not, as too many seem to think, lie upon the surface, within the grasp of every careless and fortuitous passenger. If we would obtain it, we must dig for it as for hidden treasure. Nor shall we ever want sufficient employment. The stores of natural knowledge, the wonders of the heavens above

and the earth beneath, will afford scope for the most enlarged talents: and, after all, though men will ever find new motives for gratitude and stronger incentives to piety, in every discovery they make in the natural world, yet they will fall far short of finding out the Almighty unto perfection, or of fathoming his works, whose ways are past finding out. Nor are the labours of moral knowledge and virtuous discipline less various and difficult. To trace the faculties, operations, and tendencies of the mental powers,—to mark their several relations, subordinations, and uses,—to root out the inveteracy of prejudice, to bend the will, to correct the temper, to subdue the passions, to keep the heart with all diligence, to set a watch before the door of the lips, to lay the foundations of spiritual improvement, and to grow in grace;—these are duties which will leave the most unemployed no time to spare, no abilities to lie waste.

Again, Has any man particular talents entrusted to him by Providence? Is he distinguished by superior abilities, wealth, or influence? Let him not think that no account is to be given of them. No man is born for himself alone: his talents, whatever they are, were given him for the good of others. Does he

he rise in all the majesty of genius, far above the level of his fellow-creatures? Let him take for his pattern the great and incomparable Newtón, whose abilities were always employed, through a long life, to improve men in knowledge or happiness; to discover the means of promoting their present conveniency by useful inventions; to explain the difficulties under which lower conceptions labour; to defend the cause of truth; to promote the interests of virtue and religion. Does he excel in wealth, and in the blessings of temporal prosperity? Let him follow the glorious example of the man of Ross, who was truly a faithful steward to the poor, and, on all occasions, the heaven-appointed friend of the friendless. There must be different ranks of men in life: the order of the world requires, and its changes and chances will always cause, that there should be low as well as high, poor as well as rich: his duty, therefore, is to obviate the necessary inconveniencies of this difference, by feeding the hungry and cloathing the naked, by providing for the children of affliction that cannot provide for themselves. And in the same way his superior influence is to be exerted in supporting the weak, and protecting the oppressed; in discouraging presumptuous villany, and calling forth modest worth; in leading men on to

goodness, by the powerful attraction of superior excellence and shining example.

And his account of all these will be the greater at the day of judgment, in proportion to the greatness of his talents: for to whom much is given, of him much also will be required. And dreadfully will this account be aggravated, if, instead of using them to these good purposes, he has applied them to mislead, corrupt, oppress;—if his eloquence has been employed to deceive, and his understanding to overreach;—if his riches have been squandered in luxury, and his influence exerted in seduction;—if he has stood foremost in the scenes of guilt, as well as first in the ranks of life.

2dly, The consideration of the approach of night suggests a lesson of still greater importance, when applied to the business of religion.

Man, as a reasonable creature, when he considers the purposes for which he came into the world, must see that he has enough to do, and therefore has need to do it with all his might. Religion is not the acquirement of a day, or the task of leisure. It requires the exertion of every faculty, and the improvement of every moment; seeing how much is to be done, and

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in how short a time. The duties we owe to God are active duties, and call for all our abilities. Prayer and praise to a Lord of all power and might are not to be paid with listless lips and sluggish hearts, with cold insensibility or yawning indifference: they must be gone through with seriousness and fervour; our devotion must glow: our hearts must throb. Nor is this earnestness and attention less necessary in the duties we owe to ourselves and mankind. It will call for all our care to discharge aright the duties of humanity, charity, justice, and fidelity; it will demand all our abilities and might to guard our hearts, to watch over our words and actions, to tread with safety amidst the numerous enemies that surround us; to baffle the wiles of Satan, to resist the smiles of pleasure, to subdue the allurements of lust, to shun the contagion of example. Nor is this all. There are also many heavenly graces to be acquired, many spiritual virtues to be practised, many trials to be sustained; there is a warfare of the soul, there is a fight of faith, there is a race of glory, that awaits us in the christian course: in one word, in time we are to be trained for eternity; and that time how short! how uncertain!

Yet let us not be discouraged. Though this be our service, yet it is a service which is the most perfect freedom in the world: it is a thousand times easier than the galling yoke of sin: "The religious man has but one master, "and he a gracious one in heaven: but the "vicious man has as many tyrants over him as "there are sins and follies in the world." And even if the labour of God's service were greater than it really is, yet the prize is proportionably great. An eternal reward, a crown of immortality, is a prize sufficient to animate the coldest, and make the weak strong. And for such a reward shall we grudge any pains? Shall we scruple to labour with all our might? In other pursuits we want no spur. With what ardour do we follow the delusive call of pleasure? With what toil do we grasp for earthly treasures? With what violence do we rush into the entanglements of ambition? With what unwearied perseverance do we tread the mazes of business? With what haste do we see men fly to supplant or undo a friend? With what fury do we behold them run to revenge themselves upon a supposed enemy? And shall we be less diligent and active to fulfil the great duties of humanity, to obey the sovereign commands of Omnipotence, and to be happy for ever?

Consider

Consider then, O man, what a sad choice thou wilt make, if thou bestow all thy labour upon these things, which cannot profit thee in the day of wrath. Thou mayest now suppress the voice of wisdom, which calls thee to a diligent discharge of thy duty, and stifle its salutary dictates: but the day will come, when it will burst forth upon thy soul with energy and conviction not to be resisted: the day will come, when thou wilt look back with regret upon the opportunities thou hast lost: the day will come, when thou wilt lament the neglect or abuse of thy talents. Be wise then in time; and whatever be the work which Providence has allotted thee to do, do it with all thy might; knowing that he, who would look back with comfort upon past years, or forward with hope upon future ones, must suffer no moment to pass useless or unemployed.

Thus we see the words of the text are a call to every man to do his duty in his appointed station, to cultivate his talents, and improve his time. This life is the only state of doing what our hand findeth to do. In the grave there is no exercise of knowledge, wisdom, or power; for there all the thoughts perish. There the device of the ingenious, and the knowledge of the learned, are at an end: there the wisdom

of

of the prudent is confounded, and the voice of the eloquent is dumb: there the joy that sparkles in the eye of pleasure, and the hope that pants in the bosom of ambition, is extinct: there too the time of trial expires, and, what is more, eternity begins; that eternity, which brings with it unchangeable happiness or misery.

And far off the grave cannot be from any of us: in the midst of life we are in death, and no man can say, that this very night or hour his soul may not be required. The same voice, which pronounced acclamations to the happy bridegroom in the morning, has, more than once, uttered in the evening, over the breathless bride, the solemn sentence of "Earth to earth, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes." This therefore every man should keep steadily in view, as the great motive to action. It is not, indeed, necessary that we should always have the image of death before our eyes: life has its joys and its duties, which justly claim their share of attention from us: but our mortality should be a fixed and steady principle, and should never wander far from our thoughts. And far, one would think, it could not wander. It meets us in every street and at every hour: the air we breathe, and the earth we tread upon, are full of it. Can we, therefore, want a monitor to remind

remind us, that the first great law of nature is, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou "return?"

Delay not then, my friends, to work out your salvation, whilst it is called to-day. The days of darkness are coming, in which no man can work. Even before they come, sickness may cut the thread of life, or chance dethrone the powers of reason. Or, even if this should not happen; if the evening of life should steal on us by gentle gradations, and last long; little shall we then be able to work the work of salvation. The various evils of nature, the infirmities of a decrepid body, and the debility of a languid mind, will be enough for us to bear: sufficient to the day will be the evil thereof: we need not add to it painful reflections upon our past follies, and the stinging reproaches of past guilt; we need not add the heavy load of repenting old habits, and beginning new ones: it will be enough for us to collect the scattered fragments of human resolution, and to prepare for the great change that awaits us when the night is come.

But if we have been wise enough to do with our might whatever we found to do;—if we are doomed to fall in the morning of youth, whilst the

the heart of parental fondness beats high in our favour, and the eye of expectation was looking forward to distant scenes of reputation and honour;—or, if we are cut down in the meridian vigour of age, when domestic peace encircles our hours with joy, and the artless smiles of unsheltered innocence are pleading to us for protection and support;—however hard our lot may seem;—however we may disappoint the vanity of human expectation, we shall fall in the discharge of our duty, and may therefore depend upon being rewarded by that God, who giveth to every man according to his work: and if our days be lengthened, we shall then have the pleasing reflection upon our past wisdom to console our present infirmities, and the joyful expectation of happiness to animate our future hopes;—we shall quit life, conscious of having discharged the business for which we came into it;—we shall descend to that grave, whither we are all going, with the firm resolution of men, and the animated hope of Christians.

SERMON

SERMON XXVIII.

ON GOOD FRIDAY.

1 JOHN iv. 9.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

THE same apostle, in another place, tells us, that God is love. And could any man want to be convinced of so clear a proposition, we need only refer him to the whole frame and constitution of nature around us. Wherever we turn our eyes, we meet the footsteps of a kind and indulgent Providence, the traces and signals of a God of universal love, even from the first moment of our birth to the present hour.——From nothing he called us into existence: and with what view? Only that he might shower down upon us the riches of his goodness, and make us partakers of that happiness, which he enjoyed from all eternity.

For

For us he formed the lower world, with all its various orders of beings and productions. For us he commanded the sun to shine, to cheer us with its reviving beams; the waters to flow, to quench our thirst and enrich our fields; the air to circulate to support life, and to fan us with its refreshing gales. To us also he subjected the several parts of the animal creation, and gave us dominion over the works of his hands: "thou," says the grateful psalmist, "hast put all things under his feet: all sheep "and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field, "the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, "and whatsoever walketh through the paths of "the sea." So manifold are his mercies towards the children of men!

And is it not the same indulgent affection of God, which still preserves and supports us amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life? In the day time he guides us with his almighty arm, and in the night he watcheth over us for our good. On the bed of sickness he comforts our drooping spirits, and in the hour of distress is our merciful support and protector. With the bread of life he sustains us, and refreshes our souls with the dew of heaven.

But

But the great act of God's love, which the present solemnity in a more especial manner calls upon us to remember, is the sending his Son into the world to die for our sins, that we might live through him. An act so great and astonishing, as no words can sufficiently express; a tragedy so bloody and bitter, as no tears can sufficiently bewail!

Here then let your most devout and contrite thoughts accompany me, whilst I trace this great act of God's love, from the fall of our first unhappy parent in Paradise to our final redemption, at this time accomplished at Jerusalem; that you may more fully be convinced, "what manner "of love it is that the Father hath bestowed "upon us."

In the infancy of the world, God Almighty, willing to communicate some share of that happiness which he had enjoyed from all eternity, created man upon earth in his own similitude, and breathed into him the breath of life. And that he might preserve that life, on the one hand he placed before him the pure and permanent satisfactions of innocence; on the other, the dangerous consequences of guilt and disobedience; to the one he promised the palm of eternal glory, to the other he denounced the torments of

of endless misery. He gave him moreover the freedom of choice, and to direct that choice, superadded the noble and instructive faculty of reason, and the powerful monitions of conscience. And having thus placed before him good and evil, life and death; he left him in the hands of his own counsel, to be the author of eternal happiness or misery to himself and his posterity.

Here then was a scheme of administration worthy the prudence of an all-wise Being; a plan becoming the benevolence of an all-merciful Creator. And what then was the consequence of this equitable and indulgent plan?—Sad, sad indeed, to relate! Man, being thus left to his own guidance, in spite of all the great advantages afforded him, listening to the solicitations of an evil spirit, threw off his dependence upon God, fell from his original purity, brought misery upon himself, and entailed a curse upon his wretched posterity.

And now then was his before thrice-happy situation widely and deplorably altered indeed! Now sin entered into the world, and death by sin: a deluge of corruption overspread the face of the whole earth; and this corruption was the more terrible, as its contagion not only infected the body, but tainted also the nobler faculties of the

the mind, subjecting the one to misfortune, pain, and disease; the other, to ignorance, temptation and guilt; so as to leave scarce one trace or feature of the divine purity remaining.

But worse than all this was yet behind. His infirmities and miseries he might have borne: but the anger of an offended God who can bear? His conscience told him that he had abused the talents committed to his charge, and therefore had nothing to look for but fiery indignation. What therefore shall he do in this hour of distress, or what satisfaction can he offer to appease the justice of a righteous Judge? Shall he fly to thickets for shelter, and hide himself in the trees of the garden? But will these conceal his guilt from the eyes of an all-seeing God? No: his voice will find him even there, and compel him, with amazement and trembling, to cry out, "I "heard thy voice, and was afraid." Shall he then confess himself to God, and profess amendment and obedience for the future? Still that obedience must be imperfect, and therefore could be no reparation for his past transgression. Or even, if God should have been willing to have pardoned him upon his sincere repentance and renewed obedience, yet this could have given him no hopes of a reward too, and that no less a reward than eternal salvation. And yet, unless

this be added to pardon, nature must for ever have remained unsatisfied, and the path that leads to the grave, must have appeared both to him and us all, dark, dreary, and uncomfortable.

Should he then, by way of satisfaction, offer unto God a bullock out of his house, or a he-goat out of his fold? But will God then eat bull's-flesh, or drink the blood of goats? Or if he were so disposed, are not all the beasts of the forest his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills? Is not the whole world his, and all that is therein? —What satisfaction therefore could he hope to make by giving unto God that which was his already? And after all, though God was pleased to accept of such sacrifices under the Jewish dispensation, yet it is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should ever take away sin.

It appears then, that only two methods could possibly be devised, which could afford our first parent the least glimpse of hope of appeasing the Deity's offended justice, namely, repentance and sacrifice; and both these totally insufficient to procure salvation. "He looked, therefore, but "there was none that would know him; and he "wondered that there was no intercessor."

His

His miseries, indeed, and the horrors of a perishing world, did strongly plead for a Redeemer: but where should this Redeemer be found, or who is able to deliver his brother from death, and make an agreement unto God for him?

Yet thus difficult as the task is, of finding a Redeemer, it is not impossible with him to whom all things are possible. There was yet one method, which lay hid in the gracious bosom of Providence, and which we could never have discovered, if it had not been revealed to us.

For see! when human invention was staggered, and conscious guilt was sinking under the apprehensions of divine justice, the arm of the Everlasting brought salvation, and the angel of his presence saved them. The Son of the Most High, who alone had the power of reconciling God's mercy to his justice, became man for our sakes, and by one oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

Here then let us stop for a moment, and contemplate this most extraordinary and astonishing act of divine love to man. What a surprizing

mercy was it in God the Father to find out such an expedient for us, and to send his only begotten Son to be exposed to the insults of an impious and ungrateful world! How astonishing again was it to see him, who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, putting on the lowly form of a servant; submitting not only to be man, but even to be the least and lowest of men! For such he was in every stage of life, even from his cradle to his grave. The very circumstances of his birth were such as were not only void of all worldly pomp and grandeur, but even such as would naturally expose him to the scorn of the haughty, the contempt of the rich, and the derision of fools. Though he was born a king by his office, yet mean swadling clothes were his imperial robes, and a manger his royal cradle. And no sooner was he born into the world, though the obscurity of his situation might well have concealed him from public notice, than he was doomed the victim of a tyrant's jealousy, nor could any thing less than banishment from his country deliver the helpless babe from the edge of the sword.

And even after this escape, this foreboding prelude, as it proved, to his misfortunes, what was his whole ministry on earth but one con-

tinued scene of hardship! Though his life was laid out and employed in acts of benevolence, though he even spent himself in doing good to the souls and bodies of men, yet all this could not save him from the combined malice of men and devils. Nay, his very miracles were so far from mitigating the bitterness of his persecutors, that they inflamed their rage and venom against him still more. They cast down at his feet the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the dumb; and by his all-powerful word the eyes of the blind were opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man leaped as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb did sing: yet in vain did these marvellous acts bespeak the finger of God; he met with no better return for them than that bitter and malevolent reproach, "he casteth "out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of "devils."

Yet is not this all that he did for us miserable sinners, nor did his sufferings for us stop here. The present solemnity calls upon us to take a farther view of his love to us, and to accompany him to the last act of his life, compared with which his former miseries were slight and inconsiderable.

And surely never was a greater complication of insolence and barbarity, never did the sun behold a more bloody and inhuman tragedy, in all the parts and circumstances of it! See your God, ye guilty sons of a guilty parent, for your sakes, extended on the cold ground, racked with bitter agonies, and sweating as it were large drops of blood! See him, again, betrayed by a faithless traitor; arrested as a very thief, with swords and staves; abandoned and denied by his coward disciples; accused by false witnesses; reproached as a blasphemer; condemned by the voice of an enraged multitude, as worse than guilty of the united crimes of sedition, robbery, and murder!

Behold him again blind-folded, spit upon, buffeted, mangled with whips and scourges. See! he comes loaded with his cross, and insulted with the ensigns of mock royalty! His hands are compelled to sustain a reed of reproach; his head is lacerated with a crown of thorns; and, as if these were not sufficient tortures, his ears are wounded with that insulting salutation, Hail! King of the Jews!

In the midst of these complicated circumstances of anguish and horror, loaded with ignominy, surrounded with enemies, he advances to the scene of execution, serene and silent, even

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as the lamb that before her shearers is dumb. But, though his own sufferings could not induce him to open his mouth, yet compassion for the train of female mourners that followed his steps and bewailed his fate, drew from him the language of impassioned feeling. For, hark! this man of sorrows speaks! And what? Sure, amidst all these unmerited distresses some heavy sentence will fall from his lips: a heart thus galled and wounded will vent itself in bitter reproaches of his enemies, or pathetic lamentation of his own sufferings! But, ah! how weakly do we reason from the feelings of our own narrow hearts to those of a God of love! With what indifference and composure does he speak of his own sufferings. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not "for me, for ye will soon have a far more im- "portant cause of sorrow in the many impending "miseries which will, in a few years, overwhelm "your city and nation; when the Roman eagle "shall be raised aloft over the ruins of Jerusalem, "and your boasted temple shall be laid level "with the ground. Weep not therefore for me, "who shall soon triumph over all the short-lived "malice of my enemies, but rather weep for "yourselves and your children, and for the de- "solation that is coming upon you."

But now the end of all his sufferings is approaching! The rage of his merciless persecutors, though great, cannot be infinite. He who said to the proud waves, hither shall ye go, and no further, hath also set bounds to the madness of the people. Yet what the feeble hand of human vengeance could reach, they wanted not fury and malice to accomplish. For see! with bloody and unrelenting violence they stretch him on the cross, with unfeeling barbarity they pierce his hands and feet with nails, with gall and vinegar they mock his thirst, with unparalleled outrage they deride and blaspheme his divine power and godlike benevolence, "he saved others, himself "he cannot save." And lest any thing should be wanting to finish this master-piece of horror and inhumanity, to pain they add ignominy, condemning the Lord of life to die the death, and in the company, of thieves.

Thus encompassed with shame and sorrows, thus stricken, smitten, and afflicted, thus reviled, insulted, and despised, after uttering those astonishing words, "my God, my God, why "hast thou forsaken me;" see, your Saviour bows the head, and gives up the ghost! Here then let us close the painful narrative of the cruel transactions of this bitter scene. But surely we shall but ill discharge the duties of this solemn season,

season, if we here close our own reflections on the tremendous idea of a God expiring on the cross for our sakes. Look up to that cross on which your Saviour is suspended, ye who call yourselves Christians, and ask yourselves these interesting and important questions: Is it nothing to all you that pass by? Is it nothing that never sorrows were like unto his sorrows? And have ye no interest in this man of sorrows? Can ye forbear reflecting that it was your transgressions for which he was wounded? Know ye not, that it was your sins, for which he was acquainted with grief? Consider ye not, that it was for you he died, that you might live through him? An act of mercy so new and astonishing, that language must ever fail, and eloquence be struck dumb, in attempting to describe it!

With what zeal and gratitude then should the breast of every Christian be affected, when he considers that for him and his salvation this stupendous act of love was undertaken and accomplished! With what ardour of affection and piety should we be filled, when we thus behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! I am sure, if we are not so, even inanimate nature may justly reproach our ingratitude and insensibility. For, whilst the Lord of life expired, the graves opened, the rocks rent, the sun withdrew

withdrew his shining, as if ashamed that his beams should give light to so horrid a tragedy. How much more then ought we to feel on this occasion, who were the cause and objects of all these sufferings, and whose crimes could be expiated by no less an atonement, than the blood of the Son of God.

Let us then learn ever to value as we ought this our great and truly inestimable happiness. Let us daily bless and thank that kind Providence, which has bestowed such love upon us, which has thus enlightened our hearts with the bright beams of the glorious gospel, the precious words of eternal life.—And let us ever press forwards towards that eternal life, the prize of our calling; counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, "who died for our offences, and rose "again for our justification."

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SERMON XXIX.

ON EASTER DAY.

LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.

THE melancholy scene of sorrow and suffering, which we lately commemorated, is now changed! Hushed therefore be the voice of lamentation, and the tears wiped away from all faces. We no longer bewail a Redeemer afflicted and oppressed by a barbarous band of ruffians, the scoff of insolence, the derision of fools, the victim of a blood-thirsty nation, but hail him as a triumphant conqueror. For, see! he breaks the barriers of the grave, and triumphs over all the malice of his enemies. Hasten not, therefore, ye daughters of sorrow, to weep over and anoint the body of your Saviour. The Lord of life cannot be held by the bonds of death, the holy one of God cannot see corruption. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here

here, where ye expect to find him, in the dark mansion of the grave: he is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

Such was the language of the angels to the women who came to anoint and to weep over the body of Jesus. A language how widely different from what we commonly find at the mansions of mortality! "Here lieth, mingled with his kin-"dred dust," is the last poor panegyric of human greatness, the common memorial of the triumphant conqueror and the humble peasant. But, where man's glory ends, there Christ's began. It was said by Isaiah of old, "his rest shall be "glorious." And what Isaiah foretold, our Redeemer fulfilled. The grave was his triumph, and the sepulchre the throne of his glory. In weakness he became strong, in humiliation he was exalted: though he submitted to death, he saw no corruption: he brake the bonds of death in sunder, and triumphed over all the malice of his bitter and implacable enemies.

That event, which we are this day assembled to commemorate, is certainly the greatest and most stupendous, which can occupy the thoughts and attention of man. The resurrection of a human body from the grave is a thing so new and unheard of before the christian æra, that we may

may well say, "this is the Lord's doing, and it is "marvellous in our eyes." But it is not only matter of admiration to us, as a great and wonderful event, but also is a subject deserving our warmest gratitude and affection, since it is the pillar of our faith as Christians, and the ground of all our hopes as men. For not only now is Christ risen from the dead, but also he is become the first-fruits of them that slept!

That we may therefore be fully confirmed in our Christian confidence of rising from death to immortality, I shall endeavour to shew, first, that our Saviour's resurrection is an undeniable proof of his divinity; and therefore is an incontestible confirmation of our faith:

Secondly, That we have the most full and satisfactory evidence of the truth of our Saviour's resurrection; and

Thirdly, That his resurrection is a pledge and assurance of our own; and therefore is a most comfortable foundation of our hopes.

And 1st, If the evidence of St. Paul can have any weight in this matter, he expressly tells us, that the resurrection of Christ was a confirmation of his Godhead; or, as he himself better expresses

presses it, "Christ was declared to be the Son "of God with power by the resurrection from "the dead." And this is agreeable to what the same Apostle says, in his address to the people of Antioch: "we declare unto you glad tidings," says he, "how that the promise, which was "made unto the Fathers, God hath fulfilled the "same unto us their children, in that he hath "raised up Jesus from the dead again:" as it is written in the second psalm, "thou art my Son; "this day have I begotten thee." This day, by making thee the first born from the dead, I have declared thee my Son with power; that all nations may acknowledge thy divine authority, and honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

Agreeably to this, we find that our Saviour himself constantly appeals to his resurrection, as the particular proof of his divinity. Thus he tells the Jews, when they sought for a sign from him, as an evidence of his divine mission: "an "evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a "sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but "that of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was "three days and three nights in the whale's "belly, so shall the Son of man be three days "and three nights in the heart of the earth." Thus also, when he drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, that is, out of the court of

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the gentiles adjoining to it, which as well as the Sanctuary itself was called the temple, and the Jews said unto him, "what sign shewest thou, "seeing thou doest these things?" his answer was, "destroy this temple of my body, and in "three days I will raise it up again." His other miracles did indeed abundantly demonstrate his divine power; for no man could give feet to the lame and eyes to the blind, except God were with him: but the resurrection was to be the great seal and confirmation of all, as being the most clear and undeniable exertion of divine power; for none but a God could say, "I have "power to lay down my life, and I have power "to take it again;" and also as being the least liable to any suspicion of fraud and imposture, when it had been so long and openly predicted by him.

Hence it is that St. Paul also stakes the whole credit of the Christian religion upon this single fact; "If Christ be not risen," says he, "then "is our preaching vain, and your faith is also "vain." Hence too it was, that the primitive Christians, when they would express the resurrection, called it μαρτυριον, the witness or testimony; as if the whole of their faith rested upon it. And for the same reason it was, that the whole jewish Sanhedrim used their utmost endea-

vours to stop the belief of it in the world; as well knowing, that if it could once be proved, that Jesus rose from the dead, there could be no doubt, that he was truly the Son of God.

And 2dly, That our Saviour thus did actually rise from the dead, we have the fullest and clearest evidence. For as this article is of the greatest importance in our holy religion, so there is none whose foundation is more stable and unquestionable. Nay indeed it has been so ordered by the good providence of God, that those very things, which were intended to obstruct the belief of it, have consequentially strengthened and confirmed it. Of this we have a very remarkable instance in the malicious vigilance and circumspection of the Jews. For, no sooner had they vented their malice, by dooming the Lord of life to a painful and ignominious death, than the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet "alive, after three days I will rise again: to "prevent, therefore, any fraud or imposture, "command that the sepulchre be made sure "till the third day; lest his disciples come by "night and steal him away, and say unto the "people, he is risen from the dead." And Pilate said unto them, "ye have a watch, go

"your

" your way, make it as sure as you can. So " they went and made the sepulchre sure, seal- " ing the stone, and setting a watch." Here then, you see, was a deliberate plan to crush the Christian faith, and prevent its farther progress. A guard of soldiers, a sepulchre hewn out of the solid rock, the mouth of it closed by a stone of immense weight, and that farther secured by the public seal. " Now that he lieth, said " they, let him rise up no more; he trusted in " God, that he would deliver him; let him " deliver him, if he will have him." But, how short-lived was this their triumph! and how feeble, vain man, are all thy devices against the arm of Omnipotence! What they intended as a bar to the belief of a Redeemer rising from the grave, served only to confirm and strengthen it, by removing every shadow of suspicion. For, in spite of all this sage precaution, the body of Jesus was missing, after it had lain three days in the grave. Here then was an unlooked-for blow indeed! And what could the poor mistaken Pharisees say, to ward off its weight? Could they pretend, that his disciples came by night, and stole him away, whilst the soldiers slept? But how then, it might be asked, could they come near the sepulchre, and roll away the stone, which we have good authority for saying required nearly the force of twenty men to

remove it, without alarming a numerous band of guards? Besides, if the guards had all slept, which, to those who know the severity of Roman discipline, will appear a most absurd and improbable supposition, how should they know that it was carried away? And, if they did not sleep, why did they suffer it to be carried away? Is it again likely, that the disciples, who, just before, had shewn themselves so remarkably timid and faint-hearted, should, in a moment, become so daring and resolute, as in the silent hours of darkness to break through a formidable band of soldiers, with manifest danger of their lives, and steal away a body deposited under the public seal? And if they had done so, what purpose would it have answered? The fact might easily have been proved to the world by the testimony of the Roman guard, and therefore could have been of no avail to support their cause. And on the other hand, they themselves must have been convinced, that Christ, by not rising from the dead, had deceived their expectations, and falsified his own predictions. Would it not therefore have been more natural for them, by declaring the truth, to have reconciled themselves to the chief priests and rulers, rather than, by persisting in a daring falsehood, to have courted poverty, torments, and death, the necessary consequences of preaching the resurrection?

rection? It is impossible therefore to imagine, that the disciples could either have the power or inclination of deceiving the world, in the testimony they gave.

And as little likely it is, that they themselves should be deceived in this matter. For surely it was not possible, that those, who ate with him, drank with him, conversed with him for forty days together, should be mistaken: that five hundred brethren, to whom he appeared, should all be mistaken: that Thomas, who thrust his hands into his side, and the print of the nails, should be mistaken. These are circumstances not to be reconciled with any degree of probability, and therefore leave the credit of the Apostles in this matter clear and unimpeached.

And indeed the Apostles themselves gave undeniable testimony of their full conviction and persuasion of the truth of the resurrection, in their conduct. For, though we find them, during the life of their divine Master, unable to comprehend what was meant by the rising again from the dead; though, at his arraignment, they all forsook him and fled; though, after his crucifixion, they lamented their fallen hopes, and thought that they had falsely trusted that

it had been he, who should have redeemed Israel; yet no sooner had Jesus appeared to them, so as fully to convince them of the reality of his resurrection, than they boldly preached in his name, in opposition to all the combined powers and interests of the world, and chearfully submitted to the heaviest torments that could be inflicted upon them. And whence could this proceed, but from a firm faith and assurance of the resurrection, which confirmed to them the divine mission and authority of their crucified Saviour, and taught them to look for a state of happiness hereafter, when all the sufferings and miseries of this frail life should be no more?

But 3dly, As we have undeniable proof that our Saviour rose again from the dead, so his resurrection also is an undeniable pledge and assurance of our own.

Of all the articles of our holy religion, there has been none more zealously contradicted than that of the resurrection of the body; and that for this plain and obvious reason: because none is a greater check upon the lives and manners of men. For if we are to rise again, then our hopes do not end in death: then the joy of the present moment is not the only object of the

sinner's care: there is a thought of hereafter, which will damp the smile of triumphant guilt: there is a hand-writing upon the wall, which will change the sinner's countenance in the midst of his impious enjoyments: then there are rewards to animate the desponding, and punishments to terrify the presumptuous. As then these consequences all clearly follow from the doctrine of the resurrection, it cannot be wondered, that it should at all times have been opposed by those, whose wicked lives lead them to wish, that all their guilty thoughts might perish, that there was indeed no hereafter to bring to light their hidden things of darkness, and lay open the black and treacherous secrets of their hearts.

But vainly will the sinner hope to sleep the sleep of death, or, "that he shall not return "out of darkness:" the resurrection of Christ from the dead will leave us no room to doubt of our own. For if he could by his own almighty power break the bonds of death and triumph over the grave, how should he not be able to make good his promises, and to perform that in others, which he performed in his own person? With that flesh and blood, of which we are now partakers, he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive: with his own right hand and with

his holy arm he gat himself the victory: nor is his arm shortened, that he should not raise up us by the same power with which he raised himself. We shall therefore live, and shall not die eternally: we shall live and declare the glory of the Lord: all they that go down into the dust shall kneel before him: the grave shall hear his voice, and give up her dead: he will call our scattered remains from the bowels of the earth and the depths of the sea. The dispersed tribes of the remotest nations, the mouldering millions of ancient times, shall all awake at the voice of the trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. The unhappy father of mankind shall look down with shame upon the first and latest of his posterity, whom his transgression in paradise condemned to sin and sorrow, through all the ages of the world; whilst the judge of the world shall smile upon those, whom he has redeemed from misery and the shadow of death, and receive them with that transporting welcome, "come, ye blessed "children of my Father, receive the kingdom "prepared for you from the foundation of the "world."

Happy they who shall be found in that blessed number: Happy they who prepare themselves by

by a life of virtue here, to be found amongt that blessed number hereafter! To them a resurrection from the dead is indeed a noble and transporting prospect. It is an exemption from all the cares and disappointments of life: it is the exchange of disease and frailty for life and glory: it is the putting on immortality and incorruption: it is the being reunited to our long lost friends, to the arms of tender parents, to the friends of our love, or the children of our bosom: it is an approach unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. These are indeed noble fruits of a resurrection from the dead; sufficient to warm the coldest, and make the weakest strong. They are sufficient to make us despise the miseries of life and the terrors of mortality, and to cry out with the glorious exultation of the Apostle, "O death, where is "thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! "The sting of death is sin, and the strength "of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, "which giveth us the victory through our "Lord Jesus Christ!"

But if a resurrection from the dead be thus a fountain of consolation to the good and virtuous, it is no less a fountain of terror to the guilty. For reflect, O sinner, what it is to appear before an all-seeing and just God: to stand self-condemned and trembling before the awful judge of quick and dead! to have all thy secret sins and midnight follies laid open and disclosed: to have all the generations of the world stand around thee, witnesses of thy crimes and condemnation. Hadst thou a friend that loved thee in the world; how will it rend his bosom to see thee thus appalled with fear, and sinking under thy load of guilt? Hadst thou a parent that trained thee in the ways of early piety, and watched over thy infant days with a tender and sleepless solicitude; what a heart-rending stroke will it be to hear that dreadful sentence pronounced upon thee, "go, "thou cursed child, into everlasting fire, pre- "pared for the devil and his angels." Finally, hast thou any feeling for thyself? Think, O think, what it will be to enter into all the torments of hell, to dwell with everlasting burnings, with the worm that never dieth, amidst the blackness of darkness for evermore; to be separated from God and happiness, to be excluded from every ray of hope, to feel the stinging reproaches of conscious guilt, and the agonizing pangs

pangs of a mispent life, the abused mercies of heaven, and the never ending torments of the fire that cannot be quenched.

Since then it depends upon ourselves, whether the resurrection from the dead shall be a blessing or a curse; since it is in our own choice, whether we will rise to life or death eternal; let us chuse life, that both we and our seed may live. All has been done for us that could be done by the mercy of heaven: what remains therefore must be done for ourselves. The unhappy rich man thought that his five brethren, though they were deaf to the voice of Moses and the prophets, yet would repent, if one went unto them from the dead. Even that last and greatest persuasive to repentance has been vouchsafed to us. If therefore we repent not, utterly hopeless and inexcusable must be our condition; we can have nothing to look for but fiery indignation. Let us therefore wisely determine to crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin. Let us awake to righteousness, and sin not. Let us seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Let us be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord;

Lord: For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear together with him in glory.

SERMON

SERMON XXX.

EPHESIANS ii. 8, 9.

By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.

OF all the unhappy divisions, which have torn and distracted the bosom of the Christian church, from the days of the Apostles down to the present times, none seems to have been supported with greater warmth or carried to greater lengths than the dispute—"whether "to God's grace and faith in Christ, or to "our own works we must be indebted for sal-"vation."

The zealous asserters of grace maintain, that since we can do nothing of ourselves, we should leave all to God, and not endeavour to do any thing: for since every gift of God must be perfect,

perfect, grace, being the gift of God, must be perfect too, and therefore must be left to perform its perfect work in us. So that, according to them, to allow any thing to the natural powers of man, or to attempt to please God by our actions, is the highest pitch of presumption, is the making God's grace subservient to human reason, and supposing the power of the Almighty not sufficient of itself to save us, without our assistance in the work. The strenuous advocates of good works, on the other hand, insist, that man is a free agent; that to suppose him not endued with a liberty of action is to take away all distinction between virtue and vice; since no man can be denominated good or bad for doing what he was under an absolute necessity to do; that to conceive a person impelled to do a right action by any other influence than that of his own reason, is in effect to render that reason, which God hath given him, useless, and to make him literally righteous with righteousness not his own.

Thus stands the controversy between those, who push their respective opinions to the utmost lengths; and if we must needs join ourselves to the side of one of these parties, we must either assert, that man ought to sit idle, while God's holy spirit does the whole work for him; or must reject

reject the offer made us in the Scriptures of God's grace, and depend entirely upon his own merit for salvation: neither of which opinions, I hope, any here present would be willing to subscribe to.

What shall we do then in this case? Let us diligently search the scriptures; for they alone have the words of eternal life. And I am persuaded, that any one, who reads the writings of the Apostles with due attention, and a sincere desire of coming at the truth, who will be at the pains of comparing together the several things advanced by them upon these heads, will find them perfectly consistent with themselves and with each other. And it is principally to the want of such a due attention and comparison that the continuance of this dispute among us is in a great measure owing: for each party studiously select such parts of the scripture as they think make for their cause, and as studiously avoid and pass over such as seem to make against them. And indeed thus it must ever be, whilst men are more desirous of carrying their cause, and manifesting their superiority over their adversaries, than of finding the key of knowledge, and attaining to the real truth.

Let us hear then what St. Paul says to the church of Ephesus in my text; "By grace are

"ye

"ye saved through faith; and that not of your-
"selves; it is the gift of God: not of works,
"lest any man should boast:" that is, it is through God's kindness that we have eternal life and happiness promised to us by the means of faith in Christ: but even of these means so proffered, we could not of ourselves make a proper use, unless he had at the same time given us his holy spirit to make our faith perfect: for our works cannot save us; so that all boasting of our own merit is absolutely excluded.

The Apostle's doctrine in the text being thus explained, I shall first shew that faith in Christ is the only means through which we can hope for salvation: and secondly, that true Christian faith cannot be attained without the assistance of God's holy spirit: and thirdly, that our works have no merit in themselves, and consequently all confidence in them, absolutely considered, is vain and presumptuous.

1st. I propose to shew, that faith in Christ is the only means, through which we can hope for salvation.

In order to make this appear, let us take a view of the state of man from his first origin. In the beginning God created man in his own image,

image, after his own likeness, placed him in a state of perfect innocence, and furnished him with sufficient abilities to retain that innocence intire and spotless. "He saw all that he had "made," and man among and above the rest, "and behold it was very good." In this situation then, it is plain, Adam could have no need of faith in Christ: it would have been absurd to have taught him to trust in a Redeemer: for from what was he to be redeemed, who had done nothing worthy of bondage? The terms on which the Almighty had assured him of happiness, were clear and expresss; and so long as he performed those terms, how could he dread punishment or stand in need of a Saviour? But, in spite of all the great advantages afforded him, man fell, and by his fall forfeited all right and claim to these advantages, and entailed a curse upon his wretched posterity. The case then was now greatly altered: sin entered into the world, and death by sin: a deluge of iniquities overspread the face of the whole earth, and so defaced the image and impaired the likeness of God, as to leave scarce one trace or feature of the divine purity remaining. At this universal depravity and corruption of human nature, God had great reason to be highly offended, and as he is perfectly just, could not but require satisfaction from man for so gross an abuse and perversion

version of the talents with which he had intrusted him. And what satisfaction had man to offer, to appease his majesty so justly provoked? Should he confess himself to God and profess amendment for the future? His amendment must still be imperfect: nay, supposing it perfect, yet this would be no reparation for the sins he had already committed: and though it should be admitted, (of which, however, though the light of nature may give us hopes, yet it can give us no assurance) should it, I say, be admitted, that God's infinite mercy will pardon sinners upon their sincere repentance and renewed obedience, yet could we, after so many and so great crimes as the very best of us commit, hope for a reward too, and that no less a reward than eternal salvation? And yet, unless this be added to our pardon, nature must for ever remain unsatisfied: she feels in herself something that grasps for everlasting bliss with groanings which cannot be uttered, and without this farther hope, the path that leads to the grave must appear all dark, dreary, and uncomfortable.

Should he then, by way of satisfaction, offer unto God a bullock out of his house, or an he-goat out of his fold? Can he think, that God will eat bull's flesh or drink the blood of goats? And if indeed he were so disposed, all the beasts of

of the forest are his, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills; the whole world is his and all that is therein: in him even man himself both lives, and moves, and has his being. What satisfaction therefore can we hope to make by giving unto God that which is his own already? It is indeed true, that by the law of Moses burnt-offerings and sin-offerings were instituted to cleanse and purify the people; but these certainly could have no virtue in themselves to take away sins, any farther than as they were made in obedience to the divine will, which ordained them as types and shadows of our blessed Saviour, who was to offer one sacrifice for sins, even his own body on the cross. Thus the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that "the law had but a shadow "of good things to come, and not the very "image of the things, and therefore could never "with those sacrifices, which they offered year "by year continually, make the comers there-"unto perfect: for then would they not have "ceased to be offered. Because that the wor-"shippers once purged should have had no more "conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices "there is a remembrance again made of sins "every year: for it is not possible, that the "blood of bulls and of goats should take away "sin."

It appears then, that only two methods could possibly be devised, that afforded the least glimpse of hope of appeasing the Deity's offended justice; namely, repentance and sacrifice; and both these totally insufficient to procure salvation. Thus stood the case before our Saviour's coming into the world: but one method was still left, which we could never have known, had it not been revealed to us in the gospel: the Son of God became man for our sakes; he alone had the power of reconciling God's mercy to his justice, and by one oblation of himself, once offered, was able to make a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. This he has done for us; and surely I need not say, it behoveth us to be thankful.

I hope it is by this time evident, that it is every Christian's duty to put his whole trust and confidence in God's mercy through Christ, and to look upon faith in a Saviour's merits, as the only means by which he can hope to obtain salvation.

But as faith admits of several degrees, and is therefore used in different senses, in different parts of the New Testament, it will be proper to

shew, what is the true faith required of a Christian as necessary to salvation.

Now the faith required of a Christian is not barely a belief that there is a God: for, in this sense, not only many wicked men, but the Devils themselves have faith, "they believe and trem-"ble." Nor is it a belief that Christ is the true Messias; for this too a man may believe, and yet lead a life very contrary to his precepts. But the true Christian faith is such a firm conviction of the truth and reasonableness of his several doctrines, as influences our conduct, and naturally leads us to the practice of virtue and holiness.

Now faith being understood in this complete sense, it naturally follows, in the second place, that true Christian faith cannot be attained to without the assistance of God's holy spirit.

We have seen before, from the Scripture account of the state of man after the fall, that the heart of man is warped from good and inclined unto evil continually. And if any one denies the scripture account, and pretends not to be sensible of this general corruption, we may send him to his own breast for information. This will tell him, in as plain terms as the holy writings

themselves, "that in his flesh dwelleth no good "thing; that the good which he would, he "doeth not, and the evil which he would not, "that he doeth." And this, methinks, should make him at least wish, that God would be graciously pleased to aid his infirmity, and enable him to conquer the law of sin, that warreth against his soul. Now this assistance God has actually promised to all Christians in general, through the Holy Ghost, the comforter: "Into "one body, (that is, the church) says St. Paul, "we are all baptized by one spirit." And again, "unto every one of us is given grace, according "to the measure, the abundant measure, of the "gift of Christ." So that we may all of us be assured, that unless we do despite unto the spirit of grace, the Holy Ghost is ever ready to prevent and run before us in the course of godliness, to our great and endless comfort.

But yet a man may urge, "whence comes it, "that this assistance must necessarily forerun "our faith? Is not faith a conviction of the "reason and understanding, upon sufficient "grounds; and can the understanding possibly "reject such sufficient evidence, any more than "the eyes deny admittance to such objects as "present themselves?" Let such a man but a little more attentively consider the true nature of

Christian faith, and, I trust, the objection will soon vanish. Christian faith is not merely a principle of knowledge, but a principle of religion: it has not its residence in the head, but in the heart. I have before observed, that a person may perfectly know his duty, as we see too many instances every day, and yet not practise it. And indeed we may as well suppose a man to merit eternal salvation by seeing with his eyes, as by solely admitting the truth of the Christian docrines, without conforming to them in his life. For to what purpose can his faith tend in this case, but to the increasing of his condemnation; since he sins with his eyes open, and the consequences full in his sight? He certainly can be no more deemed a good man for having the bare knowledge of things spiritual, than a man ought to be denominated sensual from the bare knowledge of the things of sense. But farther, the heart and will have more power over the understanding than many are apt to be aware of. A man, it is true, cannot withhold the assent of his reason from things sufficiently proved to him; but he may refuse to examine the proofs: just as a man with his eyes open cannot refuse admittance to external objects, but he may however shut his eyes and exclude them; and this is too frequently the case: unless the will be concurring, we are apt studiously to avoid

the light, we neglect to dwell upon the proof of truths disagreeable to our inclinations, suffer them not to sink deep into our minds, but divert the exertion of our reason into some other channel, and at least so far weaken and invalidate the evidence, as to leave it no manner of influence over the heart. In the fight of faith, on the one side combat the senses and appetites, and all the pleasures of this world; on the other, reason and religion, and the hopes and expectations of a better: but to whichsoever party the heart inclines, that party is sure of the victory. Now the heart being originally corrupt and evil, always hankering after the things of the flesh, fond of the follies and vanities of this life, and very little disposed in itself to the things that are not seen, faith must constantly be vanquished, and all the hopes of immortality frustrated, did not God's holy spirit minister fresh aid, renew the combat, bring over the heart to the side of virtue, and so defeat the hopes of sin and death. Herein then lie the inestimable riches of God's grace; the Holy Ghost corrects the wrong bias of our wills, instructs and enlightens our hearts, disposes them to faith and obedience, and yet farther strengthens them against the force of temptations, and carries all these purposes into execution by co-operating with our prayers, and interceding for their acceptance at the throne of grace.

grace. And without this farther aid, Christ had died for us in vain: for although, by this means, we were no longer considered as the children of wrath, but were re-admitted to God's favour, yet of what service would even this have been to us, unless we were at the same time enabled to preserve that favour?

Nor yet does this grace destroy the freedom of man's will: for though it is always efficacious, yet do we no where read that it is irresistible; though it is always at hand to work with us, yet do we no where read that it will work without us. On the contrary, St. Paul, with whose merits, I suppose, there are few people vain enough to put their own in competition, expresses a fear, lest that by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast away; and exhorts his converts to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, for this very reason, "because it was God that worked "in them to will and to do of his good plea-"sure." St. Peter too, cautions the elect to "give diligence to make their calling and elec-"tion sure;" and declares, that if, after they had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they were again entangled therein and

overcome, then the latter end would be worse with them than the beginning. As to what the advocates of irresistible grace assert, that grace, being the gift of God, cannot be imperfect, they mistake the notion of perfection. The perfection of a mean does not consist in its power and force, but in its being well adapted to obtain the end. Thus the perfection of a machine does not depend upon its bulk or strength, but upon the excellency of the contrivance to perform the service required of it. The obedience of man, required by the deity, is a free and rational obedience: now to suppose grace irresistible, is to suppose that he makes use of such a mean to enforce that obedience, as is so far from promoting, that it must necessarily defeat that end. So groundless and unwarrantable is their opinion, who vainly persuade themselves, that they are certainly the favourites of heaven, and destined to salvation, even whether they will or no! True faith includes a full confidence on God, on these terms only, that we approve ourselves in his sight: true grace can only be known by the spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit, that we have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.

The

The third thing I proposed to shew was, that our works have no merit in themselves, and consequently all confidence in them, absolutely considered, is vain and presumptuous.

But this I shall make the subject of a future discourse.

SERMON

SERMON XXXI.

EPHESIANS ii. 8, 9.

By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.

IN my former discourse upon these words, I endeavoured to shew, first, that faith in Christ is the only mean through which we can hope for salvation; and secondly, that true Christian faith cannot be attained without the assistance of God's holy spirit.

To prove the former of these two heads, I shewed you from the Holy Scriptures, that by the fall of Adam sin entered into the world, and corruption overspread the face of the whole earth; that this corruption called loudly upon the justice of God for satisfaction; which it was not in the power of man to give; that the only methods of atonement, which the wit of man could possibly think

think of, were repentance and sacrifice, and that both these were totally insufficient to procure salvation: that God, however, of his infinite mercy provided us with an effectual remedy, by sending his blessed Son from heaven, to make a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and consequently, that faith and confidence in his merits is the only medium, through which we can hope to obtain everlasting life.

To prove the latter of these heads, I shewed you, that as the heart of man is originally corrupt, and the will inclined unto evil continually, Christ must have died for us in vain, without some farther assistance; since it could have been of little service to us to be reinstated in God's favour, unless we were at the same time enabled to preserve that favour: that this assistance God has afforded to all Christians, by giving us his holy Spirit; to correct the wrong bias of our wills, to instruct and enlighten our hearts, to dispose them to faith and obedience, to strengthen them against the force of temptations, and to carry all these purposes into execution by co-operating with our prayers, and interceding for their acceptance at the throne of grace.

I now

I now proceed, thirdly, to shew, that our works have no merit in themselves, and therefore all confidence in them, absolutely considered, is vain and presumptuous; agreeably to the doctrine of the text, "by grace are ye saved, through "faith: not of works, lest any man should "boast." Now to clear up this point, let us consider what is to be understood by the merit of an action: for an action to be meritorious, that is, to have a right to demand a reward from the hands of any being, it must be such an one as is not strictly due to that being; it must be of some service to him; it must be as profitable to him, as the expected reward is to us; or, at least, it must be a perfect work. If therefore we can make it appear, that our best works are due unto God, are of no manner of service to him, and of consequence bear not the least proportion to the reward proposed, and are too in themselves at best imperfect, then must all merit be absolutely excluded from the actions of men towards God. Now all of these particulars are as manifest from the light of nature, as they are from the declarations of Scripture itself.

As for the first; our Blessed Saviour instructs us, "when we have done all those things which "are commanded us, to say, we are unprofitable "servants; we have done that which it was our "duty

"duty to do." And surely, if we will listen to her dictates, reason teaches us the same lesson. For when we reflect, that God was under no obligation to call us forth into being at all; that when he had called us forth, all that could be required of his justice was to assign us as great a portion of happiness as misery, and to suffer no man to be positively unhappy, unless through his own fault; when we farther consider, that God is graciously pleased to superintend us with his providence; that he has furnished us with all the means of living comfortably in this world; has provided us with such powers and faculties as are peculiarly adapted to our present state; has so admirably calculated his whole creation, as to render it of the utmost advantage to us; "when we behold his heavens, even the works "of his fingers, the moon and the stars which "he has ordained;" shall we not say, "Lord, "what is man, that thou art mindful of him, "and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Ought we not, even supposing no state after this, even in the last extremities, to cry out with holy Job, "the Lord hath given and the Lord hath "taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord?" And are we not also in strict duty bound, so long as he is pleased to continue us in being, to exert all the faculties of our souls and bodies in expressions of gratitude for such undeserved benefits?

fits? For what hast thou, O man, that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive, how canst thou glory in thy abilities, as though thou hadst not received them? For of God, and through God, and to God are all things; and thy abilities to do good amongst the rest: in his service therefore he has a right to expect that thou shouldst employ them; and that, not only for the sake of future expectations, but on account of the great things which he hath done for thee already.

Thus it appears, that our best works are strictly due to God, by reason of prior obligations. Nor is it a task of more difficulty to shew, in the second place,—that our works are of no manner of service to the Almighty. For the very notion which we have of God, is that of an infinite and independent being; a being who has every perfection in the highest degree within itself, and, consequently, that can receive no communication of happiness from any other whatever. "Who "hath first given unto God, and it shall be re-"compensed to him again." Nay, though we should be so absurd as to suppose the Deity not thus infinitely perfect, yet even then, since man is the work of his hands, he must have received all gifts wherewith he is endowed, whether corporeal or spiritual, from the Deity; and as man

could

could not possibly give again unto God more than God had at first given to him, no benefit could possibly be reflected back from the actions of men to God. "Can a man be profitable "unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable "to himself? Is it any thing to the Almighty, "that thou art righteous; or is it gain to him, "that thou makest thy way perfect? If thou "sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if "thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost "thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what "givest thou him, or what receiveth he of "thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man "as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit "the son of man: but thine actions, whether "good or bad, cannot at all affect him, who "sitteth on high among the Cherubims." It is true, God in several passages of Scripture represents himself as receiving honour and glory from actions done in obedience to his commands: but in this he only speaks to the weak capacities of men, and signifies to us, that such actions shall be as amply rewarded by him, as though his honour and glory were thereby really increased.

But should we, for argument's sake, allow, that our works actually did him this service, yet would it still be undeniably evident in the third place,

place, that the service done to him by our best works, bears not the least proportion to the reward proposed: For what is the reward proposed? No less than eternal life and never-ceasing bliss. Now could indeed the powers of man confer some new attribute or perfection upon the divine nature, this might perhaps bear some proportion to the proffered recompence. But the utmost that can be contended for, with any the least pretension to reason, is, that by the proper exercise of the human faculties some small accession is made to the glory and honour of God's majesty. And this, if true, could not surely be put in competition with an immortality of happiness! Suffering for God's sake, every one must allow, is at least as meritorious as doing a good action for his sake: and yet St. Paul, who suffered as much as perhaps ever man did for the Gospel, reckons that "his present sufferings "were not worthy to be compared with the "glory that should be revealed:" he teaches us, "that our light affliction, which is but for a "moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding "and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look "not at the things which are seen, but at the "things which are not seen: for the things "which are seen are temporal, but the things "which are not seen are eternal." But the thing is too plain to need a number of texts to

prove it: I proceed therefore, fourthly, to shew, that our works are at best imperfect. In order for our works to be perfect in the sight of God, they must spring from a pure root; that is, be the fruits of a perfect and unsinning obedience: "for a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, "neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good "fruit." So that if indeed we are intirely free from spot or stain of guilt, if we can with a safe conscience pronounce ourselves in a state of innocence and integrity, then may we venture to plead our cause before God upon the footing of our own merit, and challenge the reward at the hands of justice. But alas! who can say, I have made myself clean? "All have sinned, "and come short of the glory of God." Even a good man falleth seven times a day. And shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he found no steadfastness in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly: how much more them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust; which are crushed before the moth! If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. For how can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not;

yea

yea the stars are not pure in his sight! How much less man that is a worm, and the Son of man that is but a worm! And if this be the true state of our case, as most certainly it is, we ought not to be high minded, but to fear; we ought not to rely upon the justice but upon the mercy of God, and confide not in our own merits but in the all-sufficient merits of Christ for salvation; lest ours be the unhappy case of the stubborn Jews, who being wilfully ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, proudly refused to submit themselves to the righteousness of God.

But that our works are at best imperfect, will yet farther appear, if we will but in the least recollect, that we cannot perform them without the immediate assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle tells us, "that we are not sufficient "of ourselves to think, much less to do any "thing as of ourselves; but all our sufficiency "is of God." We have a load of corruption that weighs us down, which by our own force alone we are not able to remove: we have a course of righteousness to run; but unless God strengthens our feet, we must run in vain, and can never hope to attain the prize of glory. "Not "unto us, therefore, O Lord, not unto us, but

" unto thy name give the praise, for thy loving
" mercies sake."

It is clear, then, that in whatever light we view the very best actions of man, they carry along with them no pretensions to merit in the sight of God. But if examples be of more force with us than precepts, the holy writings will furnish us with a sufficient number of examples too; examples of men exceeding us as far in modesty and humility, as they did in virtue and holiness. " I am not worthy," says the good patriarch Jacob, " of the least of all the mercies
" and of all the truth which God hath shewn
" unto his servant." And holy David, " Who
" am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house,
" that thou hast brought me hitherto? And
" this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O
" Lord God, therefore thou hast spoken also of
" thy servant's house for a great while to come:
" but doth this appertain unto man, O Lord!"
With what diffidence also and caution doth the great Apostle of the gentiles speak of his labours without measure in the church of Christ!
" I am the least of the Apostles, that am not
" meet to be called an Apostle, because I per-
" secuted the church of God, but by the grace
" of God I am what I am; and his grace,
" which was bestowed upon me, was not in
" vain,

" vain, but I laboured more abundantly than " they all: yet not I, but the grace of God " which was with me."

How triumphantly also, and at the same time how modestly, does he declare, " I count all " things but loss for the knowledge of Christ " Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered " the loss of all things, and count them but " dung, that I may win Christ, and be found " in him, not having mine own righteousness, " which is of the law, but that which is through " the faith of Christ; if by any means I might " attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not " as though I had already attained, either were " already perfect; but I follow after it, that I " may apprehend: brethren, I count not myself " to have apprehended; but this one thing I " do: forgetting those things which are behind, " and reaching forth unto those things which are " before, I press toward the mark, for the prize " of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And if we want not only a pattern to induce us to humility, but a warning also to deter us from vain-glory, the history of Herod will furnish us with a very terrible one: St. Luke will inform us, " that upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in " royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made " an oration: and the people gave a shout, say-

" ing, it is the voice of a god and not of a man.
" And immediately the Angel of the Lord smote
" him, because he gave not God the glory;
" and he was eaten of worms and gave up
" the ghost."

What shall we say then? Are our best actions of no value in the eyes of the Deity? Does not David tell us, that " precious in the sight of the " Lord is the death of his saints;" and St. Peter, " the ornament of a meek and quiet " spirit is in the sight of God of great price?" Most certainly they are so: whatsoever is perfectly good is perfectly valuable, and whatsoever is but imperfectly good is at least valuable, so far as it is good: so that if you mean no more by our works having merit, than that they are of some value, it need not be contended with you. For as we are taught in our articles, " albeit that good works, which are the fruits " of faith and follow after justification, cannot " put away our sins, and endure the severity of " God's judgment, yet are they pleasing and " acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring " out necessarily of a true and lively faith, in- " somuch that by them a lively faith may be as " evidently known as a tree by its fruit."

Hence

Hence then appears the absurdity of those who put asunder what God hath joined together. They read, "that by faith alone we are "saved," and therefore they conclude that good works are unnecessary: they do not consider that good works are of the very essence of faith, and that faith without works is dead, being alone. True Christian faith worketh by love and charity, and by such works alone faith is made perfect; for without holy actions, as well as holy thoughts, no man shall see the Lord.—In sum, this is the true and genuine doctrine of the Church of England: "* they "believe that faith, which is alone and unaccompanied with sincere obedience, is to be "esteemed not faith but presumption, and is "no way sufficient to justification; that though "works of charity be not imputed to justification, yet they are required as a necessary "disposition in the person to be justified: and "that though, in regard of their imperfection, "no man can be justified by them, yet that, on "the other hand, no man can be justified without them."

Let each of us, therefore, as true sons of the church, and faithful followers of Jesus Christ,

* Chillingworth.

cease not earnestly to beseech Almighty God, that he would pour into our hearts the gifts and graces of his holy spirit, without which we cannot attain unto a true faith; that he would also keep us stedfast in that faith without which we cannot be justified; and on our parts, let us shew the purity of our faith by the fruits of good living; without which our faith cannot be effectual to salvation: "For though it is faith "alone which justifies a man, yet that faith "which is alone will never save him*."

* Chillingworth.

SER-

SERMON XXXII.

HEBREWS iii. 13.

Exhort one another daily, while it is called to day; lest any one of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

THE Scriptures justly represent the life of a Christian as a state of war: He treads in the dangerous paths of an enemy's country, and is exposed to the violence of open attack, and the snares of secret surprize. On the one hand, he is threatened by the undisguised malice of the world; on the other, he is solicited by the subtle insinuations of sin: The one endeavours to shake the stedfastness of his faith; the other to cheat him of his innocence by wily arts and delusive intrigues.

It therefore becomes the christian warrior ever to be upon his guard, as well against the one as the other: but yet, from which of the two his virtue is most in danger, is no very difficult matter

matter to determine. The enemy who fairly avows his hostile intentions, may indeed be terrible, but never insuperable; we may at all times secure ourselves from his fury by prudence and courage: But the ruffian who stabs in the dark, or the villain who borrows the garb of friendship to ruin us, what art can evade, what strength withstand? "It was not an open "enemy that did me this dishonour," said the Royal Psalmist, in the bitter anguish of his heart; "but it was even thou, my companion, "my guide, and mine own familiar friend." And the same complaint will every one have reason to make, who bars not his heart against the insidious approaches of sin: For however he may, for a moment, be pleased with its specious blandishments, he will soon find that, like his first unhappy parent, he has sacrificed his innocence to the seductions of a serpent, whose endearments are misery, and whose friendship is death.

To prevent therefore these dangerous consequences, I shall make it the business of this discourse to guard the christian soldier against the devices of his spiritual adversary, by pointing out some of the most usual methods by which the deceitfulness of sin imposes upon mankind.

Now

Now the first step which is generally taken by sin to beguile men of their integrity, is to tempt them to go to the extreme verge of what is lawful; a step the more dangerous, as it is of all the least liable to suspicion, and yet the most artfully adapted to the credulity and weakness of human nature. At our first entrance into life, fearful and innocent, we tread with caution, and shudder at the very thoughts of approaching the confines of guilt. As we advance farther, our apprehensions gradually wear away, and curiosity, pleasure, interest, or example, draw us on by little and little, till at last, perhaps, confident of our resolution, we even dare to tread upon the dangerous line, which divides the regions of right and wrong. This then is the unhappy period from whence we may date the beginning of corruption in the soul: For it can never be, that a creature like man, frail and fallible, should long stop here. The same motives, which led him thus far, will not fail to operate strongly in leading him on still farther; and he who is once barely just, assuredly will not be long before he is unjust.

See then the native innocence of man destroyed, and the image of his God first polluted, by some slighter deviations from the paths of duty!

Here

Here conscience, the faithful guide to his steps, interposes its restraining alarms, and endeavours by timely remonstrances to warn the young sinner of his danger. It tells him, that these smaller transgressions must be washed away by penitential tears, and pathetically represents the fatal consequences of yielding to the first attacks of sin. And happy were it for him, could he be prevailed upon to listen to the voice of a charmer, which charmeth so wisely! But here again, sin, ever attentive to counteract the salutary dictates of reason and conscience, once more defeats his better resolutions, by suggesting, that the Almighty regards these smaller breaches of duty with a favourable eye: that he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss; nor will call him into judgment for neglecting the less weighty matters of the law. And thus the deluded young christian is again driven from his guard of virtue, and sees not that he is pursuing a path, which must terminate in unavoidable destruction.

But stand still for a moment, unhappy youth, and consider the danger of listening to so fatal and fallacious an adviser! It is indeed true, that God will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss; for "he is a God of knowledge, "and by him actions are weighed:" He knoweth

knoweth whereof we are made, and therefore will make favourable allowances for the infirmity of our nature; nor will expect from men, the purity of angels. But yet for sins, however small, if deliberately and repeatedly committed, we have no grounds to expect mercy at his hands: On the contrary, the law is express and plain, "the man that doeth these things, shall "surely die in them."

But even were this not the case, still how great is the danger of being imperceptibly led from these smaller crimes to the commission of greater! It would almost be impertinent to remark, that all wickedness is of a progressive nature; so many striking proofs of this truth do the crowded scenes of life every moment exhibit.

The murderer, who plunges the bloody dagger into the breast of his unoffending fellow creature, seldom rises from the bed of innocence to the commission of so foul a crime. Human nature, unless steeled by past guilt, and rendered callous by long habit, would recoil at so black a deed, and the nerveless arm of the assassin would drop, unable to execute the savage purposes of his heart. But trace back the guilt of the murderer through its various stages, to its first

first origin, and who is there that does not immediately see, how easy is the transition from thoughtless dissipation to riot and luxury, from luxury to distress, and from distress to violence, rapine, and murder? So natural and almost necessary is the gradation from one crime to another, in every species of wickedness: He, therefore, who would hold fast his integrity, ought carefully to avoid even the commission of the smallest sins; since he can never be certain, that these will not in time lead him on to the greatest.

But let us proceed to other instances of the deceitfulness of sin.

It was the just remark of an ancient writer, that virtue needed but to be seen to be admired; and we may with as much justice say, that vice needs but to be seen to be abhorred. Could we behold it in its genuine colours, surrounded with all its proper train of consequences, the stings of a wounded conscience, the cries of injured innocence, the horrors of desperation, and the dreadful expectations of futurity, we should want no arguments to induce us to fly from it, as our most dangerous and detestable enemy. But the misfortune is, we generally either see the consequences of guilt through false

false mediums, or see them not at all. Conscious of its own deformity, sin ever flies the piercing light of truth, and endeavours to hide itself under some borrowed garb. Sometimes it assumes the wanton attire of pleasure, to allure the young and the gay; at others, it lurks beneath the seducing form of gain, to captivate the old and the prudent. And it must be owned, that these insidious disguises too often impose upon the judgment of mankind, and cheat the incautious Christian of his innocence and integrity; who, while he looks at the present pleasure or profit which offers itself to his view, sees not that sin is sheltered beneath it, and death, the wages of sin.

"Follow not a multitude to do evil" was the important advice of a man well acquainted with the deceitful nature of sin, and the danger of example and custom in leading men on to the commission of the worst crimes. Nor is this advice less important in these times, than it was in the days of old, and the years that are past. Human life turns upon the same principles, and is guided by the same passions in every age. Sin still continues to support itself under the strong protection of custom and example, and by their sole influence leads on thousands of its unhappy votaries to certain destruction,

struction, in defiance of the combined powers of reason and religion. For proof of this, I need only appeal to that most savage practice of duelling, which is still supported in this infatuated kingdom, by the force of custom alone; though confessed to be diametrically opposite to every sentiment of reason, humanity, and religion.—Whence is it also but from custom, that the unblushing libertine securely profanes the appointed day of rest, nor remembers that the God who made heaven and earth commands him to keep holy the sabbath? It is the same unhappy force of custom that wipes off shame from the brow of infamy, and under the name of fashionable and polite pleasures, gives a sanction to the worst crimes that can disgrace human society. Authenticated by the signature of custom, the frauds of the gamester pass uncensured, the oaths of the swearer meet with no reproof, the effrontery of the titled harlot excites no indignation, the debaucheries of the drunkard are received with approbation and delight. So powerfully does the deceitfulness of sin operate in making custom and example the unhappy instruments of deluding men into eternal perdition!

But above all, sin is most dangerous and most successful in imposing upon mankind, when it assumes

assumes the name of virtue, or borrows the attire of innocence. The man who is in this way beguiled of his integrity, affords, I had almost said, no hopes of his recovery. He is insensible of his disease, and therefore remedies are offered to him in vain. He feels not the checks of conscience, he hears not the expostulating voice of reason, nor is awed by the terrors of religion. He knows indeed that reason forbids, conscience condemns, and eternal justice will punish guilt: but so long as the deceitfulness of sin continues to persuade him that his vices are virtues, vain are the restraints of conscience, vain the admonitions of reason, in vain does almighty vengeance stare him in the face.

That vice should ever thus be able to impose upon any reasonable man, will perhaps at first sight seem strange. But allow me to say, that it is no less true than strange, and may be confirmed by almost innumerable examples drawn from common life. Thus, for instance; disguise the frantic joys of drunkenness under the softer name of social freedom, and innocent mirth, and the debauchee who nightly reels with unhallowed steps from the haunts of intemperance, shall feel no remorse. Thus, again, call but the firebrands of slander and detraction, a

conscientious regard for truth, and the black calumniator shall haste from the unfinished tale which robs a neighbour of his peace, of his reputation, and of every thing that is dear to him, to praise God for having endued him with principles of christian benevolence. Conceal the guilt of avarice under the mild appellation of frugality, and a necessary provision against the uncertainty of human events; and the wretch whom the gnawings of an insatiate temper have worn to the bone, shall remain insensible to the tender meltings of pity, shall break asunder every bond of humanity, and trample under his feet the sacred duties of charity and mercy; and yet, after all this, will cry out with pharisaic confidence, "God, I thank thee that I am not "as other men are."

I will not encroach upon your patience by producing farther examples: The volume of the world is open to all, and he must read it with little attention, who cannot see a thousand crimes into which sin allures men by assuming the mask of virtue. But I cannot dismiss this article without lamenting the unhappy fate of virtue; whose fair form, by being thus prostituted to the basest purposes, is unhappily blasted, and too often becomes the undeserving object of ridicule and contempt.

These

These then are some of the most common delusions by which men are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. But there still remains one behind, more fatal and destructive than all the others. For did they stop here, the unhappy sinner might in time awake from his dangerous dream, and by an immediate and hearty repentance, recover the lost favour of God. But to prevent this, our spiritual adversary once more takes advantage of the weakness of human nature, and lulls the awakened conscience of the sinner into a fatal security and repose; by flattering him that God will accept of his future repentance, and that the tears of a bed of sickness, will wash away the crimes of an impenitent life. This is the powerful charm which encourages men to go on in sin, and to fill up the measure of iniquity: it is this which supports the young man in his folly and wickedness, which stifles the alarming convictions of divine grace, and brings down even the hoary head, loaded with unrepented crimes, to the grave.

But stop for a moment, wretched man, whoever thou art, that trustest on this broken reed of a late repentance, and consider the danger of thy condition. Tell me on what thy vain confidence and security is founded: or how knowest thou that God may not cut thee off in the midst

of thy sins, without allowing thee time to repent? Or even should this not be the case, still how canst thou be assured, that thou wilt be disposed to repent, when the hour of death approaches? May not God in vengeance harden thy heart, against the power of grace, and withdraw that mercy, which thou hast so often rejected? Or even if thou shouldst be disposed to repent, why shouldst thou hope, that that repentance will be effectual to salvation; or what plea hast thou to be accepted at the eleventh hour, who hast deliberately and wilfully stood all the preceding day idle? No: though it proceed from the weakest of human tongues, yet let this solemn truth sound in thine ears, deluded sinner, as if it were from the voice of an angel, that there is little likelihood that God will accept the dregs of that life, the prime and vigour of which thou hast spent in the service of the devil.

Thus we see the various stratagems by which sin triumphs over the weakness of man! Thus by degrees is his integrity seduced, his reason perverted, his judgment corrupted, and his hopes of glory frustrated and defeated! And we must with sorrow confess, that even Babylon in ruins affords not so melancholy a spectacle, as this once glorious heir of immortality thus sunk into corruption and buried in sin.

Let

Let us not, then, be wanting in our endeavours for our own safety, by guarding our hearts with all diligence; since from them are the issues of life. Here the first assaults of sin are made, and here must the guard of virtue be placed to repel the fiery darts of the wicked. We must suspect its approaches under every disguise, and be prepared against it in every moment; since, like the ambushed Indian, it often wounds most dangerously when unsuspected and unseen. But I must be suffered to repeat, that we must more particularly be watchful, that it does not seduce our integrity under the specious appearance of innocence, of pleasure, of profit, of custom, or example. These, these are the intoxicating ingredients, which sweeten the deadly potion of sin, and conceal its bitter consequences from the sinner. Against these therefore, must we employ our utmost vigilance, against these exert the combined strength of reason and religion. Yet after all, when we have used our utmost endeavours and circumspection; when we have done all that mortal strength can accomplish; we must confess that all our labour will be fruitless, without the assistance and co-operation of divine grace. This, this alone is the heavenly shield, which can render us invulnerable to the assaults of sin, and guard us against the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

To this, therefore, as to our only sure and impregnable fortress, let us fly with open arms in the day of distress. For this let us not cease to prostrate ourselves in prayer before the footstool of that God, whose all-seeing eye pervades the frame of nature, and whose all-powerful arm can alone direct and support our trembling steps. And may the all-gracious Parent of the universe ever afford us such a measure of his holy spirit, that we may be safe under the shadow of his wings here, and eternally happy in his kingdom hereafter!

SER-

SERMON XXXIII.

EPHES. v. 16.

Redeming the time.

IT has been justly remarked, that there are many truths of the greatest importance, which by frequent repetition seem to lose all their weight and influence upon the minds of men. Thus we hear men daily complaining of the shortness of life and certainty of death; and yet, as if no such truth existed, they are constantly forming long and distant schemes for enjoying the one, but making no preparations against the other. And the same thing is no less true with regard to our time. We are all of us ready to acknowledge its great value and importance, to lament its swift lapse and our own inability to recall it; and yet, as if we did not believe the very truths we speak with our tongues, we all of us prodigally waste it in indolence, in vices, or at least in trifles and follies unworthy of a reasonable being.

The fact is, these solemn truths, which are thus ever in our mouths, too often die upon our lips, and do not reach the heart. We echo back the common voice of past ages, without thought, and without examination. No one is disposed to dispute the justice of observations which come so well recommended, and in so unquestionable a shape; and therefore we suffer them to pass on, without ſtaying to consider the great and important lessons they teach. We number our days, but we do not apply our hearts to wisdom.

On this ground, I hope, I may be justified in calling your attention to so common and trite a subject as the use and value of time. For though many of you may have frequently considered it already with due attention and seriousness, yet some there are, perhaps, the thoughtless and giddy wanderers in the flowery paths of the spring of life, to whom the subject is new; and even those to whom it is not so, will find no loss, I trust, in the review of so excellent a subject. The language of my text calls upon us to redeem the time: that is, to put every part of it to a good use; to employ the present time in laudable persuits, to repair the neglects and failures of the past by a double diligence; and to prevent and anticipate the future by a wise foresight and circumspection. These are the several

several parts of time, which we are called upon to redeem and improve.

The first and principal employment of our present time should be in the service of God. For surely it is an indisputable point of reason, that the God who made us what we are, should command the first fruits of our abilities. We should therefore make his word and will a principal part of our study, we should labour to promote his honour, we should meditate frequently on heavenly things, we should diligently attend the stated times and seasons of public worship, we should strive to conform ourselves to his divine perfection by conquering our lusts, by resisting the temptations of the world, by working out our own salvation, and by promoting that of others. And surely these are duties, which will leave no time unemployed, no intervals of leisure to hang heavy and oppress us.

I must however remark, that though these great duties should be our first and principal concern, yet they ought not to be our only one. It is a very wrong and injurious notion of the duty we owe to God, to suppose, that it requires us to be always upon our knees, or shut up in cells or caves. God never made a hermit or a recluse; the pride or weakness of man has made many

many. But surely, if any truth be plain, it is so, that the christian religion was never meant for the destruction of society: Its natural tendency is to make men good fathers, good friends, and good subjects. The man, therefore, who spends his time in the faithful discharge of the duties which belong to these several relations, spends it usefully, and agreeably to the will of God; nay, I will not scruple to say, is better and more acceptably employed than the strictest devotee, who macerates his body with incessant fasting, or wears his knees to the bone with continual praying.

To spend the present time well then, is to spend it in a manner suitable to the glory of God, and our own circumstances in life.

And as these circumstances vary, so our duties must necessarily vary in the same proportion. But yet, so long as we improve our time in the best manner to the faithful discharge of the duties of our calling, be it what it will, we may rest assured that we are fulfilling the will of God, who hath assigned to every man his several movements in the great machine of the universe, his several parts to act on the great theatre of life.

But

But the words of the text not only thus call upon us to employ the present moment well, but also still more strongly call upon us to redeem the time that is past. And that can only be done by redoubling our diligence and zeal, and by doing that in a little time, which ought to have been the labour and business of our whole lives. And who is there that feels not in himself the necessity of thus redeeming the time he has lost? If I look back upon my past life, how many parts of it do I see mere blanks and vacuities, unmarked by any, or at least any laudable, traces of action?

How many more, alas! stained with the blots of guilt, or deformed with the ridiculous deviations of folly? How few distinguished by the performance of reasonable, useful, or generous actions? The apostle therefore wisely calls upon every man to redeem the waste of his past time: If I am in the prime and vigour of age; to redeem the follies of youth by a strenuous application of those talents to laudable purposes, which are now in their highest perfection and power. If I am in the middle of life, and am, as it too often happens at that age, heavy laden with the burden of my sins, and under the dominion of evil habits; to redeem the time, thus doubly lost, by endeavouring to root the evil seed

seed out of my heart, by resisting that torrent of temptation, which carries me down the dangerous stream of perdition, and by putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And if I am in the decline of age; if I have seen many revolving years pass over my head without improving them as I ought; if I feel the springs of nature within me weak, but the power of confirmed habit strong; if I see the work to be done is much, and the time for doing it, both short and uncertain; then to redouble my speed, to make haste to be wise unto salvation, lest advancing age and growing infirmities should render me incapable of running the race that is set before me, or the night of death should overtake me, when no man can work. This is the way, in which the apostle advises every man to redeem the past time. Let every man, therefore, who hears me this day, seriously lay it to heart, and forgetting those bad habits which are behind, and reaching forth unto those better things which are before, press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

But farther. We may not only thus redeem the past time, but we may also, in some sense, redeem the time to come, by our wisdom and virtue. Thus the man who labours to conquer the

the infirmities of his nature, to subdue the force of temptation, and to establish wise and pious resolutions, certainly redeems the time to come, by making his future progress in holiness easy and pleasant.

Thus again, the man who by works of charity and beneficence, shews his zeal for religion, and his love for the poor members of Jesus Christ, certainly redeems the time to come, and lays up in store for himself a treasure in heaven, which shall be repaid him when he stands in need of it, in any future hour of distress. Thus also those noble benefactors to their country and mankind, who by permanent establishments have endeavoured to alleviate the various miseries of afflicted mortality, may justly be said to have redeemed the time to come, nay, I had almost said, eternity itself. Being dead, they yet speak by their works to posterity, in this forcible language, "Go and do thou likewise." Being taken from among men, their memory liveth for ever, and shall be had in everlasting honour. Being poor and miserable sinners like ourselves, their alms and oblations are gone up for a memorial before God, and, through faith in Christ, will entitle them to a glorious reward, when time itself shall be no more.

These

These are the several ways then, by which our past, present, and future time may be redeemed and improved. And surely I need not use many arguments to shew the wisdom and necessity of thus redeeming and improving it.

God has sent us into the world, as into a wide extended theatre, whereon we are to act the part allotted to us. To him belongs the appointment and duration of the part we are to act, but on ourselves it depends to act it well or ill. But though the choice be thus far in ourselves, the event of it is not so. For the same God, who has assigned to us our duty, has also unalterably fixed the conditions of discharging it. If we acquit ourselves with fidelity, an unfading crown of glory is reserved for us.

Since then the state of eternity depends upon our performance of the part assigned us in life, and since the short span of life is all that is allowed us for the trial and exercise of our abilities in performing it; how much does it become us to redeem every hour, to suffer no moment to pass without some mark of our application and diligence in our weighty and important calling? But our time is not only thus important on account of the great business to be discharged, but also on account of the rapidity, with which

it

it flies from us. The ancients, agreeably to their expressive symbolical language, represented it with wings, to denote its hasty flight. But it needs no symbols to remind us of its celerity. Time has a thousand tongues of its own, to proclaim that it is hastily flying on. The repeated knells of our departed hours, the quick succession of day and night, the revolving seasons, the loss of our friends, and our own decaying bodies and altered looks, all declare this solemn truth, in a language not to be mistaken. And indeed we are all of us sensible of its speed, when we reflect at all on our own existence. If we look forward indeed, thirty or forty years may seem a considerable period: But if we look back upon the same space, how short is it? It is like a dream when one awaketh: The day of our birth and the present moment seem parted by an almost imperceptible line. Even the friends who have long been mouldering in their graves, seem but to have parted from us yesterday: their looks, their sayings, their actions, are fresh in our memories, though all that now remains of what we once knew of them is reduced to the poor pittance of dust to dust, ashes to ashes. If therefore we hasten not to mark our progress through life by wise and virtuous actions, we shall find ourselves at the end of our journey, before we are aware of it, and before we are prepared

pared to give up our accounts to the great Judge of quick and dead.

We should farther consider, that the uncertainty of time, so far as it relates to us, is equal to its swiftness. Time indeed will still continue to flow on, whether we exist or not, and to-morrow will be present, as yesterday was. But it may not be present to us. To-day is all we can call our own; for, as an elegant writer expresses it, "Yesterday is dead, to-morrow is unborn." Yonder sun, whose beams now rejoice our eyes, will rise again to perform his daily course; but we cannot be sure that we shall do so; our eyes may be closed in death, ere his chearful presence enlightens the chambers of the morning; even strength and youth combined afford no security. And surely, if the early promise of the morning flower be blasted by an untimely fate, it can be no wonder if the grass of the evening be cut down, dried up, and withered. And indeed so many are the accidents to which we are outwardly exposed, and so delicate and complicated is the inward structure and organization of our bodies, that we may justly be said to exist by a miracle, and cannot be sure of our existence for one moment. Since then the future is so uncertain, it is the strongest argument to employ the present moment well, to suffer no day to pass

without its proper share of duty; lest vain and fruitless wishes, a wounded and despairing conscience, should be our only companions in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

If such then be the value and importance of time, it will afford us but a melancholy prospect to consider, how it is generally employed, either by ourselves or others. It will give us but little comfort to look back upon the many days we have spent in trifles and vanities, in idle discourses and childish recreations, calculated rather to beguile the flying moments of our time than to improve them to our profit.

But if we have little comfort in looking back upon the childish waste of our time, we have still less, I fear, in reviewing that, which has been employed to worse purposes, in the service of sin. It will give us little pleasure to remember, and yet the day will come when we shall be forced to remember, how much of the time allotted us we have spent in lewd thoughts, or unlawful lusts, in sinful pleasures, or dishonest persuits, in dishonouring God, or injuring our neighbour, or in adding some way or other to the black catalogue of our sins and vices. And yet such is the view, which the retrospect of life will too generally exhibit to us!

What then shall we do to compensate for this fatal loss of our past hours, which will one day lie so heavy upon our consciences? The plain answer is in the words of the apostle, "Redeem "the time." Let those who are yet in the morning of life, and have lost but little of their time, press forwards with vigour to the end of their journey, without suffering themselves to be drawn aside by youthful lusts or irregular desires. Let those who are in the middle of their course, remember, that their sun will soon decline to the west, and may, even before that, be obscured with impenetrable clouds and darkness: That therefore it becomes them to work, whilst the light is with them; and whilst their faculties are yet fit for labour and application. And as to those who have almost finished their course, but without answering the great ends for which they were sent into the world, who are grown gray in sin as well as in age, what shall I say? What language can paint their folly in its proper colours? What eloquence can rouze them to a state of serious consideration? What voice can impress upon them, with effective energy, these awful words: "Awake thou that sleepest, arise from "death?"

Indeed, my friends, yours is a truly dangerous situation. It is the situation of Lot in Sodom, when

when the destroying angels stood over it: unrepented guilt is around you, and the flames of destruction are ready to burst forth under your feet. You have no time to lose. Summon therefore all your vigour to escape for your lives, before it be too late. Take up the feryid petition of Lot to the destroying angel, "Behold now this city is near to flee unto, and "it is a little one; Oh! let me escape thither, "(is it not a little one?) and my soul shall "live." And may God inspire you with such a lively sorrow and compunction of heart, that you may truly repent you of your past sins, and be accepted into the kingdom of your heavenly Master, even at the last hour, though ye have stood all the day idle!

Lastly, let me recommend to every one of you, of whatever age, the serious consideration of that solemn prophecy contained in the book of Revelation: "And the angel which I saw "stand upon the sea, and upon the earth, "lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by "him that liveth for ever and ever, "That "there should be time no longer." My brethren, when this prophecy shall be finally accomplished, can be known only unto him who liveth for ever and ever. But to us it is fully accomplished, whenever death shall have closed

our eyes. To us, time is then no more. To us, the sun is for ever darkened, and the stars shall no more give their light. To us, the time of trial is ended, the time of grace is expired, the time of repentance is cut off, and an eternity of torments or happiness from that moment begins. How therefore does it become every one of us to guard against being surprized in an unlooked-for hour by that awful period! How does it become every one of us to redeem the time by acts of virtue and benevolence! How does it become every one of us to beseech the giver of all good gifts, that he would so teach us to number our days, that we may steadily and in earnest apply our hearts unto that wisdom, which can alone ensure to us a state of never-failing happiness, when time shall be no more!

SERMON XXXIV.

GALAT. iv. 4.

When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son.

SINCE God, at the creation of the world, placed mankind in a situation perfectly worthy of his infinite wisdom and goodness; since he made them rational and free creatures, and consequently capable as well of exalting and improving, as of debasing and impairing their natural faculties; it cannot justly be said, that he lay under any necessity of sending his Son into the world at all. However, when men in general had so far deviated from the paths of righteousness, and were so far degenerated into the grossest ignorance and stupidity, as scarcely to have any impression of their Maker remaining upon their minds, it was doubtless most earnestly to be wished, that the

Almighty would provide some means to conduct them back to the right way, and to restore them to a just sense of their obligations to the only true God. But this they could not have the smallest pretence to demand as a matter of strict right, but must owe it entirely to his great and unlimited goodness towards the children of men.

Would it not, therefore, strongly excite the wonder of a thinking man, to find any person so impiously daring, as to impeach even the divine justice, because God did not send his Son in the flesh sooner! And yet, bold as it may seem, this is one of the grand points in dispute between the christian and the deist. "If," say these free-thinkers, as they affect to call themselves, "God always acts for the good of his "creatures, would he not rather have dis-"covered such things as made for their good, "by sending them a Saviour from the beginning "of the world, than have deferred it for four "thousand years together, even till the time of "Tiberius?" To a true believer it were a sufficient answer to quote the testimony of my text, which assures us, "that God sent forth his Son, "when the fulness of time was come:" For as we have the divine authority, that Christ came in due time, though we were not able to assign one

one single reason, why that precise time was pitched upon, yet would it surely become us short-sighted mortals to put an implicit confidence in the consummate wisdom of our all-seeing Creator, and thankfully to embrace such an inestimable benefit. It happens, however, that, in the case before us, God hath not left himself without ample witnesses of his wisdom, but has furnished us with abundant means to check the presumptuous petulancy of the enemies of revelation, and to confirm the faith of all sincere christians.

It is seldom, and never with pleasure, that I enter upon subjects of controversy in this place, which is much more properly adapted for the cultivation and advancement of practical faith and virtue in the world. It may, however, sometimes be not improper to do it: lest infidelity should assume confidence from our silence, and fancy its arguments unanswerable, because we rarely condescend to notice them.

The point in issue between us on the present subject, is, whether any good reason can be assigned, why the coming of the Son of God into the world was so long delayed.

Let us then consider, first, whether if the incarnation of Christ had happened in the beginning of the first age of the world, it would not have been in great danger of being treated as the creature of fiction, and ranked among the stories of dark and fabulous ages. The world, it would be said, was then in its infancy; barbarism and ignorance prevailed; arts and sciences were but little cultivated; and what imposition could be too gross for mankind, in that unlettered, unenlightened state, to swallow? We find, from experience, the faith of Christians themselves too much weakened by the long interval elapsed since our Saviour's coming: and if this be the case with Christians, what would it then have been with those, who even now take such pains to disbelieve revelation, and to reason themselves into infidelity? It is at this day one of their standing objections against the credibility of the gospel-history, that the facts therein recorded are represented as having been done so long ago: they pretend that the strength of the evidence in their behalf keeps continually decreasing, in proportion to the distance of time: from whence we may judge, how readily these very persons, who now affect to complain that God sent his Son too late, would have been to cavil, as though he had come too soon, had he been born four

four thousand, or even one thousand years, sooner. One good reason, therefore, why the Messiah did not come in the flesh sooner, was, that the distance of time might not tempt us to disbelieve the reality of his incarnation.

A second reason to be assigned, is, that the great necessity the world was under of a Redeemer would not in that case have been so apparent. As no one can say, that God ought to have sent his Son without any need of him on our part; so was it farther requisite for us to be made sensible of that need, in order to impress upon our minds a higher conception both of his infinite goodness, who appointed us a Redeemer, and of his, who took our nature upon him, to redeem us from our sins. In the most early times, revelations were so common, and the will of God so openly declared unto men, as to supersede the necessity of the Messiah's appearing in those days; nor could any thing less than the most wilful blindness, and most obstinate negligence, efface the repeated impressions of the Deity out of their hearts. Yet, notwithstanding all this, we find, that in a few ages, all flesh had corrupted their ways before God, and were sunk into the most sottish ignorance: Superstition and idolatry triumphed without control, and the ruins of religion

gion lay buried under a heap of the most extravagant and shocking rites and ceremonies. In one small corner of the earth alone, among the people of Israel, the worship of the true God was preserved, while all the rest was sunk in the unfathomable abyss of stupidity and corruption. But even God's peculiar people themselves were quickly infected with the general contagion, and strangely addicted to forsake the living Lord, and to follow the vain gods of their heathen neighbours. To put a check to this spreading evil, God exercised them with hardships and afflictions, gave them his chosen servant Moses for a leader, and imposed upon them the severe yoke of the ceremonial law. Yet, not all their journeyings and distresses, not all their religious rites and ceremonies, proved sufficient to continue in full force the remembrance of the commandment given to their forefathers, or restrain them from revolting continually, and returning to their wallowing in the mire.

After this, God sent all his servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them; yet they hearkened not unto him, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and did worse than their fathers. Their last captivity, it is true, cured them of their proneness to idol-

worship;

worship; but, in every other respect, they still remained a most wicked and perverse nation; punctual, indeed, to a tittle, in ceremonial observances, but totally regardless of the weightier matters of the law.

Thus do all the ages previous to our Saviour's coming, furnish us with incontestible proofs, to what a deplorable state mankind had reduced themselves by their own folly and wickedness. In vain did the prophets inculcate obedience to the law, and produce signs and wonders, in support of their divine commission, to the Jews: in vain did the philosophers call in all the arts of learning and policy to their aid, to enforce the precepts of morality upon the Gentiles: both still continued perverse and irreclaimable, and both remain to this day, a striking testimony, how greatly the whole world stood in need of a Saviour. Which consideration alone is sufficient to convince us, that it was wisely ordered of the Almighty not to send forth his Son, before the exigencies of the world were most urgent and most manifest.

A third reason, why Christ was not sent sooner, was, that without the evidence of prophecies, his reception would have been attended with greater difficulties. Prophecies and miracles

racles are the only two means, by which we can conceive the Deity revealing himself to the world: and in a matter of so great importance to mankind, it was expedient for them to have all the evidences which the thing would admit of: God, therefore, willing more abundantly to shew unto all men certain marks whereby to distinguish his Son, gave them the double testimony of prophecy and miracles; that by two indubitable proofs, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast. In the prophecies, Christ's miracles were foretold; and in his miracles, the prophecies were completed; so that each mutually corroborated and supported the other. Accordingly we find him in his disputations with the Jews frequently appealing to the record which the prophets bare unto him, and arguing from what had been predicted concerning the Messiah, to what they saw with their own eyes fulfilled in him. Nor did this way of reasoning fail to produce correspondent effects: great numbers were convinced out of the writings of the prophets, that he was the true Messias, and became converts to the christian faith.

His miracles alone were indeed a convincing proof of his mission; but yet it might have staggered

staggered the faith of some, when they observed, that few or no prophets had foretold his coming. They would have been apt to think it something extraordinary, that little or no previous notice had been given them, that their prince had sent scarce any harbingers to prepare the way before him. But when they had the strongest conviction, that, in the several ages of the world, even from the beginning of time, his coming was not only appointed but predicted; when they found the nation, the tribe, the family, the person and the time, all accurately pointed out, by degrees, in different ages, and by different persons, and all these meeting together with a most surprizing harmony in the blessed Jesus; one would think no man could entertain the least doubt, whether he were the very Christ.

The advent, therefore, of Christ was so long delayed to afford a fuller testimony and stronger confirmation, that he really did come at the last.

A fourth reason, why Christ was made flesh at this particular time, was, because the heathen world had now been blest with sufficient opportunities of becoming acquainted with the writings of Moses and the prophets, and of consequence with the divine purpose of sending a Redeemer. The people of Israel were at first separated

separated in a very remarkable manner from the rest of the world; but after they had been sufficiently distinguished, as well by the peculiarity of their religious and political institutions, as by the frequent interposition of an almighty arm in their favour, God then saw fit to open a free communication between them and other nations. They were accordingly sent into captivity; not only as a righteous judgment upon them for their enormous wickedness, but also out of God's great mercy to the Gentiles; to the end, that his name and truth might be known among them also; that what the prophets had foretold concerning the Messiah might be spread throughout all the ends of the earth, and every people be set in readiness, to admit and embrace Him, who was appointed "the Desire of all nations," and the joy of the whole earth. Ten tribes, therefore, of the Jews were carried away captive into Assyria, and afterwards the remaining two into Babylonia. Cyrus, whom Isaiah had many years before pointed out, even by name, as the deliverer of the Jews, actually set them at liberty, in consequence of being made acquainted with that remarkable prediction. And as the prophecies were most considerable about the time of the captivity, so did the great conquests of Alexander make still farther room for their reception. And when through those conquests

quests the Greek became the most universal language, God put it into the heart of a heathen prince to enquire after the sacred writings, and cause them to be faithfully translated into that tongue, by which those prophecies became generally known in the heathen world. And farther, when the empire fell into the hands of the Romans, great numbers of the Jews, as we find in the Acts of the Apostles, were dispersed through all nations under heaven, and consequently those nations could not be strangers to the nature of their religion and expectations. Thus it appears, then, that no revolution happened in empires, no blessing or calamity befel the Jews, which did not most signally tend to awaken men's attention, and pave the way for Christ's introduction into the world. It is very clear from the records of profane history, that throughout the whole east it was believed, that about the time when our Saviour came, a King was to arise out of Judæa, who should rule over all the earth. With this the Persians and Chaldeans would of course be acquainted, from the captivity of the Jews, and the prophecies of Daniel among them; the Arabians would know it, not only as they were descendants of Abraham, unto whom the promise was given, but also from the contiguous situation of their country, and their frequent commerce and intercourse;

tercourse; the Mesopotamians would know it, by all these means, and yet farther, by that eminent prophecy of their countryman Balaam, who foretold the coming of Christ under the character of a Star. The wise men, in consequence of this persuasion, came from the East, that is, out of Persia, to worship him, and in consequence of this persuasion, that suspicious and aspiring tyrant, Herod, sought to take away the life of the infant Jesus. And, that this notion extended itself over the rest of the Roman empire, is evident from the writings of the heathen authors of those days: insomuch that it was accounted no unacceptable compliment to one of their emperors to insinuate, that he was the person marked out and looked for in the East; the prince that was to rise up amidst a despised and detested nation. Nay, so strong and forcible was the received opinion, so much were the eyes of all men upon the watch, that neither the mean and obscure condition of his reputed parents, nor even a stable and a manger were sufficient to conceal their Sovereign from their notice. This then was the fullness of time; this was the most favourable and convenient season to usher the Messiah into the world, since Providence had now so wonderfully disposed and prepared the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, for the expectation of him.

A fifth

A fifth reason, why Christ was born at that precise season, was, the peculiar temper and disposition of that particular age; which was certainly the most fitting and proper for him to be born in; as several very striking singularities conspired together in it, which not a little conduce to the proof of the certainty of the religion which he came down from heaven to establish. That æra is so conspicuously remarkable, and the history of it has been handed down to us by so many eminent writers, that it is more studied, and generally better known, than perhaps any period of time besides. And it was highly fitting that a matter of that nature and consequence should come to pass in such an age; to the end that it might be thoroughly enquired into in any age afterwards, and that no distance of time might occasion such doubts to be raised concerning it, as should render it the less certain to any, who are willing to acquaint themselves with the truth of it. And such, I trust, it will ever approve itself to every candid and impartial judgment. If it had been an imposture, this surely had been the most unlikely time of any for it to succeed in. No prince could be more jealous than Herod, who was so greatly alarmed and incensed at the report of our Saviour's birth, that he very plainly shewed how strongly he believed it. And no

age perhaps since the creation of the world, was less liable to be imposed upon than this; wherein learning and all the polite arts and liberal sciences flourished, which enlighten men's understandings, and make it a most difficult and improbable enterprize to put a cheat upon them. Policy might boast its highest perfection in the courts of Augustus and Tiberius; insomuch indeed, that they have been looked upon as the completest patterns of it ever since. The Scribes and Pharisees were in very great power and authority at Jerusalem, who were a most subtle generation of men, and the most dangerous enemies any man could have to deal with. Wickedness, which was likely to give the greatest obstruction to a pure and undefiled religion, was absolutely the fashion of the age; nor indeed was that empire ever so totally abandoned to work all manner of iniquity with greediness as at the time of the first promulgation of the Gospel. And as men were then most capable of detecting any imposture, so must they also have been very desirous to find the christian system false, which attempted to put such a curb upon licentiousness, and laid the axe to the root of all their much-beloved and long-accustomed vices. Vice would be sure to make a most eager defence, and put in its strongest plea; and no forgery could be so artfully contrived as to

escape

escape its interested researches, when it had such a number of cunning and devoted advocates.

The pride of the philosophers, too, could not fail being piqued at the setting forth of these new and upstart doctrines: and indeed we know, that it was the professed design of the Eclectic sect of philosophers in that age, to examine every opinion, without prejudice or partiality, by whomsoever it was proposed: and the philosophers of those times were inferior to none, either in their obstinacy in adhering to their old opinions, or in their art and skill in opposing new ones. For, with the permission of the deists and atheists in our own days be it spoken, the christian religion met with its subtilest and most dangerous enemies at its first publication.

Nor was the religion of peace to be established sword in hand: it was not to take advantage of any troubles and combustions in the empire, as that of Mohammed afterwards did: but it was to recommend itself by its own intrinsic excellence and efficacy to the serious and impartial examiner. In this conjuncture of time, therefore, the Saviour of the world appears: and he appears in a mean and low condition, despised by his own people, who quickly became

as much despised themselves by all the world besides. The Prince of Peace is born in a time of settled and universal peace, when men had most leisure and opportunity to weigh and consider things; and when, by the establishment of the Roman empire in its meridian height and fullest extent, the communication between nation and nation was thoroughly free and open, and the apostles and their followers might find an easy admittance to preach the Gospel in all parts of the world; yet to be alike derided and persecuted in all! But, notwithstanding these disadvantages, Christianity soon made its way into the court of the emperor himself, where craft and luxury, and every thing that is most contrary to the purity of the Gospel, reigned unawed and uncontrolled. "A "little one," saith God by his prophet Isaiah, "shall become a thousand, and a small one a "strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in "due time." And accordingly we find, that St. Paul could glory of his proselytes even in Cæsar's household: and his bonds in Christ were manifest throughout the whole palace, and in all other parts of Rome. And it was the boast of the primitive Christians, that they were but of yesterday, and yet filled the court, the senate-house, and every place of public resort.

Thus then did Christ, by coming at that remarkable æra, prove beyond contradiction, that he had not only courage to encounter, but also power to vanquish, all the prejudices of the world, and superstitions of the people, the interests of priests and the vanity of philosophers, the pride of rulers and the malice of the Jews, all the learning of Greece, and all the power of Rome. And the Gospel, in the hands of a few persons of low parentage and education, of no learning or eloquence, of no policy or address, of no repute or authority, despised as Jews by the rest of mankind, and as the meanest and worst of Jews by the Jews themselves, approved itself to the most prejudiced minds; it stood all trials, and surmounted all impediments, that wit, and erudition, and policy, and vice, could throw in its way. And surely we may now, therefore, safely venture to pronounce that true, which neither learning, nor prejudice, nor wickedness, nor interest, with all their united efforts, could ever prove to be false.

Since then the evidence of our Saviour's coming in the fullness of time is so well founded in truth, and carries with it such incontestible marks of divine wisdom, surely they who pretend to disbelieve or doubt of it, must be more perverse than the Jews of old, more stupid than

the very heathens themselves, who, blinded as they were by their lusts and prejudices, could not long resist the dazzling brightness with which it was surrounded.

And for us, who think ourselves well established in the firm belief of our Saviour's coming in due time, happy will it be for us, if we are equally established in the habitual practice of those virtues and graces, which he came to recommend.

SERMON XXXV.

1 JOHN ii. ver. 17. latter part.

He that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever.

"FEW and evil have the days of the years "of my life been," was the language of good old Jacob to Pharaoh, in ancient times. And little, I fear, is the state of man altered for the better since his days. We enter the stage of life in tears, we tread it, for a few short moments, amidst pain and anguish, and then descend with sorrow to the grave of our fathers.

And must we, then, end here? Are all our hopes and desires to be buried with us in the grave of mortality? When yon blue regions of heaven darken upon us, must the black mantle of eternal night overspread us? Must we bid an everlasting adieu to all our friends, wishes, and enjoyments? Is there no other world? Is there

no compensation for what we leave behind us? for the evils we have suffered, the fortitude with which we have resisted, or the patience with which we have endured them? Having been made in the image of God himself, and raised so high above the rest of the created world, must we lie down in silence with the beast that perisheth? Melancholy indeed would our lot be, were this the case; dark and gloomy the prospect of life, were it thus to be terminated by mute oblivion and torpid insensibility! But, blessed be God! the religion we profess affords us nobler expectations than these; it points out to us a better state hereafter, and comforts us under the fleeting fashion of all things here below, by assuring us, that "he that doeth the will of God "abideth for ever."—"He that doeth the will "of God:" this is a just and lively description, it is the only true and sure criterion of religion. The Apostle does not say, He that knows the will of God; for we must know it in order to do it. But to know it is not enough: too many have knowledge without practice, faith without works, light without heat, and eyes without hands; who fancy that religion consists in mere speculation, and place all virtue in the understanding, rather than in the heart. But these are not the Christians that will abide for ever: the kingdom of heaven is not promised to those who

who cry, Lord, Lord; but to those who add to their knowledge, virtue; who do the will of their Father in heaven.

Secondly, We may observe here, that he that doeth the will of God, is opposed to him that loveth the world, and is led away by the lusts thereof. And so we find it in other places of scripture. "For the grace of God," says the Apostle, "that bringeth salvation, hath ap-"peared to all men, teaching us, that denying "ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live "righteously, soberly, and godly in this present "world." He, therefore, that will do the will of God aright, must be crucified to the world: he must put off the old man, and be renewed in the spirit of his mind.

Thirdly, He that would do the will of God aright, must do it, not reluctantly, not by force and compulsion, but freely, willingly, and cheerfully; not by an external, pharisaic obedience only, but by the better and inward obedience of the heart, by which the whole man, and all his faculties, are led to bow to the divine instructions and precepts of his Maker; and that not by sudden fits and transient starts, as passion or humour prompts him, but regularly, constantly, and uniformly. This, and this only, is the obe-

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dience of a Christian, to which is annexed the glorious promise of abiding for ever.

But how can we say, that he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever, when we see him subject to the same vicissitudes, to time and chance, to pain and death, in common with the rest of the creation? He passes through the various states of existence like other natural beings, and undergoes the successive changes of increase and decay: he feels the follies of youth, the cares of manhood, and the infirmities of age; and after a few short turns upon the stage of the world, he passes away like other men: for "wise "men die as well as the foolish and ignorant." How then can we say, that the righteous man abideth for ever?

In answer to this, we are to consider, that it is not the corporeal or animal life of the religious man; not his outward condition, nor his worldly ties and relations, to which this eternal permanency is promised; for these are subject to the same changes and alterations with the rest of the perishable things of this world: but it is the inward and spiritual life of the Christian, his relations to God, that abide for ever. It is not this poor, frail, fleshly tabernacle, this mass of disease and corruption, which we drag about for a few years,

years, but it is the sublimer part of our composition; in one word, it is not the man, but the Christian, that abideth for ever.

And well may the righteous man be said to abide. If we view him in the present life, he is firm and steady amidst all its changes and chances. If he meets with disappointments, he is not dejected; if he is afflicted, he does not despair; if he falls, through inadvertency or surprize, (and what man is there who does not sometimes fall?) he rises again by repentance, and supports himself by trusting in God. Inspired by this, amidst trials and temptations, he is enabled to fight the good fight of faith, and to come off victorious, though men and devils oppose his progress with united powers. For, as the Psalmist long ago observed, "They that put "their trust in the Lord shall be even as mount "Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth "fast for ever." Relying therefore on Him, who is the Rock of Ages, he looks down on the storms and tempests of the world with tranquility: he despises its vanities, and he fears not its frowns; being assured, that "neither death, "nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor "powers, nor heighth, nor depth, nor any "other creature, shall be able to separate him "from the love of God in Christ Jesus." In this

this confidence, therefore, he remaineth firm, and abideth.

And if we carry our view beyond the grave, we may certainly say, that "he that doeth the "will of God, abideth for ever." His body, indeed, will return to that dust from whence it was taken: but that is but his earthly house, and his clothing: but his immortal soul, emancipated from the vassalage of corruption, and freed from the fetters of its corporeal prison, will return to God, who gave it; and, whilst the soul of the wicked is doomed to everlasting destruction, will rise to the regions of immortality, and there rejoice, amidst unfading pleasures, at God's right hand, for evermore.

If, then, any one shall ask, How he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever; here is the short and certain answer.

After he has done the will of God on earth, he will be translated to enjoy immortal, incorruptible, immutable, perfect, and eternal happiness in heaven. This is the great promise of the Gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light. This is the glorious reward, which the great Author of the Gospel promises to those that believe in him:—"He that believeth in me "shall

"shall never die." This is the animating hope, for which every true Christian is contented to strive and suffer; knowing in whom he has believed, and being persuaded, that he is able to keep that which is committed to him. And, in fact, without this hope, what would be able to sustain the infirmity of a man? for surely, if in this life only we have hope, we are of all creatures the most miserable: equally subject, as we are, to vanity, decay, and corruption, with the rest of the animal world; corroded with a thousand melancholy cares, which they never either anticipate or feel; it would be too heavy a load, after all our sufferings for virtue, to find our expectations deceived, and that we had strove, fought, struggled, and run in vain. The man, therefore, who endeavours to shake the foundations of Christianity, and thereby to rob the Christian of this hope, is the greatest of all enemies to human happiness. He takes away the pillow, on which every species of misery has long been accustomed to repose, and substitutes in its place nothing but the horrors of looking forward to utter extinction and annihilation of being. In the beautiful language of the poet, "The "soul, secure in its existence, laughs at the "drawn dagger, and defies its point;" but, take away this security; tell us, that, after a short and painful life, we shall lie down with the beasts that

that perish, and mingle with the clods of the valley, and what shall support us under the pressure of misfortune, the pangs of disease, the loss of our friends, and every other misery incident to human life?

But, blessed be God, if there be any certainty in argument, if there be any reason in man, if there be any truth in the Gospel, this will never be the case. For, "godliness has the assured "promise, not only of the life that now is, but "also of that which is to come." In the house of our heavenly Father there are many mansions prepared for the righteous: this he himself has told us, who came down from heaven, and was the maker and builder of it: this he himself told us, who is gone up into heaven, as our forerunner, to prepare a place for us, that where he is, there we may be also: since, therefore, he lives, we shall live also, and abide with him for ever.

The word "abide," methinks, carries with it a most welcome sound to us poor pilgrims, who wander about in this vale of tears: for it implies a fixed and settled habitation, a constant and permanent state of rest. We have here no continuing city: we have nothing but what either soon forsakes us, or what we must soon forsake: we

we are in the state of travellers, who are strangers in the land, and wish only to reach their destined home. Our ideas are clogged and imprisoned; they want to expand themselves in a purer region, to throw off the shackles of darkness and ignorance: and our bodies, ever fluctuating and decaying, wait only for that irreversible decree of the Almighty, by which it is appointed unto all men once to die. But the righteous have a city above, which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God; a kingdom which cannot be shaken. They look forward to that harbour of immortality, where no storms of affliction can reach them; where the waves of ungodliness cannot make them afraid; where this poor shattered vessel of mortality, long buffetted with the storms and tempests of life, shall anchor in safety, and enjoy an eternal and unchangeable repose.

Let then this inconstant and perishable world pass away, with all its toys and vanities: it is not the object of the Christian's wish or concern: we look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; which will never change, and where we shall abide for ever.

Thus, then, there remains a rest for the people of God, for those that do his will: a rest from all

all the pains and calamities of life; a rest from all the temptations of the world, the ensnaring solicitations of the flesh, and the delusions of the devil; a rest from all our own evil thoughts and conscious guilt, which here disturb and harrow our souls. What, then, can shake our hopes, or disturb our quiet? Our passions will all move at the command of reason: there will be no terrifying remembrance of past sins to wound us, no remorse of conscience to startle us in the silent hour of midnight, no gnawing worm to prey upon the fading cheek of distracted guilt. And as the horrors of past transgressions will not fill us with amazement, so neither will the fears of future misery torment us. It is the happiness of eternity we are to enjoy. God, who is greater than all, has promised to give it us for ever; and who, then, can pluck us out of his hand? Change and chance belong only to this mortal life: all there is immortal and immutable. There dwells the great Jehovah, that eternal God, who hath neither beginning nor end of days. There reigns the Saviour of the world, who hath the keys of death and hell, over whom the grave has no dominion. There are those immortal spirits, the glorious orders of Cherubim and Seraphim, that surround the throne of God day and night. There is a sun that never sets; riches which moths do not corrupt, nor thieves break through

and

and steal. There are incorruptible crowns, and never-fading glories. There, too, are the spirits of just men made perfect, of those who have done the will of God, and therefore abide with God for ever.

But some will say, perhaps, what certainty have we, that we shall enjoy this happiness? What proofs are there of this immutable duration and felicity of good men?

In answer to this question, I might produce innumerable topics of argument, but I shall not now insist upon the common proofs of a state of reward and punishment hereafter, which I have, upon many other occasions, laid before you. I shall confine myself to that assurance we have of it, from the immutability of God, the veracity of his promises, the certainty of his word, and the fellowship we have with him, and his Son, Jesus Christ.

If, then, there be a just, immutable God, faithful in his promises, I affirm, it necessarily follows, that he that doeth his will, abideth for ever. For, to what purpose does the scripture make such frequent mention of the immutability of God? Why is he called the God "which is, "which was, and which is to come," but to

confirm our faith, and teach us that our hopes are built on a solid foundation? For this reason, the Psalmist, after he had said, "Thou art the "same, and thy years shall not fail," immediately adds also, "the children of thy servants "shall continue, and their seed shall stand fast "before thee;" thus making the immutability of God the foundation of the immutable state of his servants. In the same manner the prophet Habakkuk, from the eternity of God concludes the immortality of the righteous: "Art not "thou from everlasting, O Lord my God? we "shall not die." And, by a like kind of reasoning, our Saviour concludes, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive, and that their bodies will rise again; "because God," says he, "is their God: now he is not the God of the "dead, but the God of the living; for all live "to him." And the same conclusion we may draw from the unlimited promises of God. For, when he is called the God and rewarder of the faithful, since he is eternal, he must always be their God, and, consequently, they must abide for ever. So true, then, is that, which is declared in the Book of Wisdom; "God created "man to be immortal, and made him an image "of his own eternity." And again, we may draw the same conclusion from what the scripture says of the word of God; that it is an incorruptible

corruptible seed, and abideth for ever: which serves to assure us, that the righteous will abide for ever. For the word is the seed by which they are regenerated and quickened. If, therefore, the seed be immortal, they who are quickened by it, will be immortal too: for such as the seed is, such is the plant; and such as the principle of existence is, such is the life: from corruptible principles, such as flesh and blood, can proceed only a corruptible life; but from immortal and incorruptible principles, such as the word and the spirit, proceeds immortal life: Now the Gospel is such a principle of life: for it expressly tells us, that "God so loved the world that he "gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever "believeth in him should not perish, but have "everlasting life." These are the express terms of the new covenant, which cannot be broken or disannulled: for Christ hath sealed them with his blood, and God himself has ratified them to us, by three most undoubted miracles, the resurrection of Christ, his ascension into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven. These are the great earnests of our own resurrection.

If, therefore, the spirit of him, that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in us, we can have no doubt, but that he, who raised up Jesus from

the dead, will also quicken our mortal bodies, and make them like unto his glorious body, and that, if we do the will of God, we shall abide for ever.

You see then, my brethren, that the present life is no more than the passage to a better, to an eternal and more enduring one. What then remains, but that we learn, from this great and important truth, the just value we ought to assign to each. We are placed for a short space of time, in this vale of affliction, by the hands of a wise and just God. Let us, therefore, do our several duties in it chearfully, and agreeably to the gracious designs of his providence: Let us endeavour, by an honest industry, to provide for ourselves, and those who look up to us for support, the comforts and conveniencies of life: and let us enjoy them, too, with a chearful and contented heart; knowing, that every creature of God is good, if it be received with thankfulness. But, amidst all our comforts and best enjoyments, let us remember withal, that we have, here, no abiding city: A few short moments, and not one stone shall be left upon another, of all that we possess or admire. Let us not, therefore, make them the final objects of our happiness. Our bodies must remain upon earth, till our appointed time come, but our hearts

hearts and nobler faculties should be in heaven. Thither, therefore, let all our thoughts and affections ultimately tend. The span of life bears but a small proportion to the great circle of eternity: the pleasures of vice are utterly inadequate to the rewards of virtue. The one may give us a few short and transient glimpses of joy, but the other will give us unchangeable and eternal happiness: "For he that doeth the will "of God, abideth for ever."

May we, therefore, do his will on earth, as it is done in heaven! May all the nations of the world hear and obey his awful voice; that when the trumpet of God shall summon the quick and the dead, they may give up their accounts with joy, and having done his blessed will on earth, may abide with him, for ever, in heaven!

SERMON XXXVI.

1 Tim. iii. 9.

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

THESE words contain one of those directions which St. Paul gave to Timothy, when he left him to govern the church at Ephesus; that he should observe this injunction himself, and also require it of those, whom he admitted into the ministry of the church, "that they "should hold the mystery of the faith in a pure "conscience."

What the Apostle here calls the mystery of faith, he afterwards, in the end of this same chapter, calls "the mystery of godliness;" and what he means by this mystery, he explains in the words immediately following:—"God was "manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, "seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles,

" believed on in the world, received up into " glory." This mystery, then, was the incarnation of the Son of God, who took human nature upon him, and suffered death to redeem mankind: an instance of love and condescension so amazing, as could not have entered into the strongest imagination to conceive, or the most sanguine heart to expect: and yet, because it was a mystery, it has been foolishly rejected by many, and the most wonderful mercy in God has met with no better return than the basest ingratitude in man; and every term of reproach, which the rage of infidelity could suggest, has been liberally bestowed on those who have dared to stand forth as its champions and defenders.

Now the complaints raised against us, for insisting upon the belief of the mysteries of the christian religion, are chiefly founded upon this: it is pretended, that we thereby exclude the use of reason in matters of religion, and require a blind and implicit obedience: nay, indeed, some have roundly asserted, that these mysteries were all human invention and subtile priestcraft, to ensnare the consciences and understanding of men.

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This is indeed a heavy and interesting charge: and had it been as true as it is heavy, we, who are the stewards of these mysteries, should then have justly deserved that obloquy and ignominious treatment, which some have so liberally bestowed upon us. Or, had we alone the custody of these mysteries, and others had not free access to examine the nature and evidence of them; or had they been, like some of the oracles of old, enveloped in impenetrable darkness; they would then have had room to expatiate against us, and some colour of ground for their complaints. But where is the foundation for this malignant charge, which the patrons of infidelity are so eager to fasten upon us? Are not the scriptures in their hands as well as in ours, and do we demand their assent to any thing that is not revealed in them? Nay, we are so far from encroaching upon the province of reason, that we glory in being its warmest advocates. We desire nothing more earnestly, than that men would examine into and search the scriptures and the nature of their evidence: and we doubt not but upon a fair scrutiny they would find, that these mysteries, proposed to them as objects of their faith, would appear to them, as well as the moral duties therein contained, to be not the words and invention of men, but, as they are in truth, the word of God.

For

For we are certain, that whatsoever is offered to mankind as a divine revelation, ought to carry along with it sufficient evidence of the divine authority; and men are not only at liberty to use their reason, but it is their duty to inquire into the nature of the evidence, and the truth of the doctrines contained in it. And if the evidence appear to be such, as cannot be ascribed to any power but that of God, and the doctrines contain nothing unworthy of God, or contrary to reason, they are equally bound to acknowledge such to be a divine revelation.

Let us apply this, then, to the Gospel revelation.

The external evidence is supported by undeniable facts: for the miracles wrought by our Saviour and his apostles were, both by friends and enemies, confessed to be such, as no man could do, except God were with him: and fairer credentials could surely neither be expected nor desired. By a word speaking, to open the eyes of the blind, to unloose the tongue of the dumb, and to raise the dead to life, were such evident marks of the divine power, as were abundantly sufficient to solve all the

the doubts of the sceptic, and humble the pride of the philosopher.

And the relation of these facts is conveyed down to us with so many circumstances of truth, as no other history can parallel. We have, therefore, all the satisfaction of the reality of our Saviour's miracles, which the nature of the thing will admit, and, consequently, sufficient evidence of the divine authority in the support of the Gospel.

And if we look into the internal evidence: the moral duties contained in the Gospel are so calculated for the universal happiness of men, that those very persons, whose vanity will not permit them to own that they receive any assistance from its precepts in their rules of morality, still equally contend with us for their being obligatory upon the practice of men. If then, we should allow, that these duties were discoverable by reason, as well as enjoined to us by the authority of revelation, still, so long as they are acknowledged to be duties, and men own their obligation, they cannot pretend, that they contain any thing unworthy of God, or contrary to reason. Among the adversaries of Christianity, therefore, we do not find their party to be great, who pretend to deny the facts

facts and miracles done by our Saviour and his apostles, nor theirs, who oppose the necessity of observing the moral duties of the Gospel: But, in the other part of the internal evidence, consisting of matters of faith, the belief of which we affirm to be necessary to salvation, the advocates of infidelity are numerous, and the outcry is great, as if we endeavoured to lay such a burden upon them as they are not able to bear.

But let us examine impartially the justice of these complaints.

Authority has always been allowed to be a just ground of assent. Whatsoever then the divine wisdom has thought fit to inform us in; whether it relates to his own nature and perfections, or our duty and conduct; we are bound to believe it on the authority of the revealer. Now to suppose that such a revelation contains any thing contrary to reason, implies a contradiction in the very terms: For, as God gave us both reason and revelation, it is inconsistent with his justice and goodness, to give us faculties to deceive us, and with his veracity, to reveal a falsehood. But, that there may be truths in this revelation above our capacities to comprehend, we may well conclude from the shortness of our knowledge in the common appearances of nature:

ture: for, notwithstanding the great and amazing discoveries in every part of natural philosophy, there are still many things far above the reach of reason either to comprehend or explain. Thus, for instance, we know that the planets perform their revolutions in certain periods, and that, notwithstanding their immense distances, their light is transmitted to us with incredible velocity: these are truths we every day experience: and yet, as to the manner in which they are effected, we must confess our ignorance. So likewise the production of animals, the vegetation of plants, the cohesion of matter, are things entirely above our comprehension; and yet no one doubts the reality of them. How, again, our souls and bodies are united together, and act upon each other; how external objects cause inward sensations in us; we can no way demonstrate; and yet we should esteem him an ideot, who denied that these things were so. Which ever way then we turn our eyes; whether we survey the variety of objects around us, or consider our own frame and composition of soul and body; the minutest things in nature, as well as those of the greatest magnitude, are equally above our comprehension, and we cannot account for their several operations: and yet, at the same time that we confess them to be mysteries, we believe them to be true;

true; nay more, we must conform our actions to that belief: for, should we not offer to move, till we could account for the motion of our bodies being made by a thought in our minds, we must for ever sit still. Should, again, the patient resolve not to try the efficacy of the medicine prescribed to him, till he could fully comprehend the manner of its operation, after all his search, he might die with despair. But men will not argue so absurdly in common life. They are contented to allow, that many things, nay every thing in nature, is above their finite comprehension, and yet they readily acknowledge both their existence and use for all the purposes of life. And if then in things natural, we cannot arrive at certainty, but are forced to act upon principles we do not understand, how absurd it is to suppose, that we should fully comprehend things that are spiritual, and how unreasonable is it to reject the doctrines of religion, because they contain some things incomprehensible?

But to shew this still more fully, let us only consider the attributes of God.

God is a being of infinite perfections: he is infinitely wise, powerful, just, and good. Now to assert that we can fully comprehend these perfec-

perfections, is, in short, the same thing as to affirm, that our capacities are infinite also. But all that we can pretend to know of the divine perfections, must be deduced from analogy; that whatever perfection is in the creature, must be, in the highest degree, in the creator. Yet, to say that the wisdom of God is like to the wisdom of men, only extended to an infinite degree, or that the goodness of God is correspondent to the goodness of men infinitely enlarged, will be very far from giving us any perfect notion of infinite wisdom and goodness. Again, that God can do every thing that is possible, and that from infinite knowledge nothing can be concealed, are truths which cannot be denied: and yet, who will infer from thence, that he can fully comprehend the nature of an omnipotent and omniscient being, or the manner, in which these attributes are exerted and displayed? That God must necessarily exist in all points of duration, and that an infinite being must fill every part of space, our reason informs us: yet how weak and imperfect are our notions and conceptions of eternity and immensity, and how unable are we to solve all the difficulties, which may be started about these essential attributes of the Deity?

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We know then, that the perfections of God are infinite, and we are bound to believe them; but for our finite capacities to comprehend them is impossible.

And as his perfections, so his counsels and resolutions in the general scheme of his providence concerning the salvation of men, can be no farther known than he has been pleased to reveal them.

If then in this revelation of his will to men, there should be some doctrines, which are above our capacities to explain, why are we not equally obliged to believe them, as well as those truths in natural knowledge, which we cannot solve, or the notion of the divine attributes, which we cannot comprehend; especially when our belief of those doctrines is an acknowledgement of the belief of one of those attributes, the veracity of God? Now reason itself will shew us, that we ought to acknowledge all the divine attributes, and we must necessarily own, that God is a God of infallible truth, as well as a being of infinite wisdom and goodness: infallible truth, therefore, must be one of his attributes. And as God could have no other end in revealing his will to men, than to promote their happiness by directing them to their duty, we must consequently

quently be inexcusable, if we do not believe all those things, which he has revealed, upon his testimony, and thereby make an acknowledgement of this attribute. This faith is absolutely required of us: for if we believe only those truths in this revelation, which are self-evident or demonstrable by reason, we shew no regard to the veracity of God and his testimony; for we should have believed them, had they been affirmed by the most fallible men, because they carry their own evidence and conviction along with them. It is not, therefore, inconsistent with the attributes of God to require of us the belief of some truths, which are above reason, as trials of our faith, and evidences of our submission to his authority.

We acknowledge, then, that there are doctrines contained in this revelation which we cannot comprehend; such as the incarnation and death of God's Son, the unity of the Trinity, and others relating to the counsels of God; and yet we affirm, that we are bound to believe them, because we cannot any other way shew our acknowledgement of God's infallible truth and veracity, than by giving our assent to those truths, which are above our comprehension, upon the divine authority.

And the reason, why some men do not concur with us in the belief of these truths, is their not distinguishing between things that are above reason and things that are contrary to it. But because they cannot fully comprehend these doctrines, they hastily conclude, that they must be false and impossible. Now before it can be proved that any proposition is false, we must fully comprehend all the parts of it, and the whole matter contained therein: will they assert then, that they know so much of the divine nature, as to demonstrate that what is affirmed in the scriptures concerning it is false or impossible? It has been proved already, that our finite capacity cannot fully comprehend the perfection of God and the manner of his existence: whatever, therefore, is contained in the scriptures concerning the manner of God's existence, may be possible, and consequently may be revealed: but what God has revealed we are bound to believe to be true, because it has the testimony of him, who cannot deceive or be deceived. If, then, the incarnation of the Son of God is affirmed in the scriptures, or that God exists in three persons, we admit these doctrines to be incomprehensible, and that we have no adequate ideas of the parts contained in these propositions: but, at the same time, we must acknowledge, that God perfectly knows the manner

manner of his own existence, and, therefore, we must believe what he has revealed to us concerning it, upon his indisputable authority.

From what has been said, it appears, that we do not require a blind and implicit obedience, or exclude the use of reason in matters of religion. For it is by the use of reason, that we examine into the proofs of the revelation, and by the guidance of reason, into the nature of the doctrines contained in it, whether they be contrary to it or not: and when we are convinced of these two points, all that we insist upon is, that if, upon examination into these doctrines, we find any that are incomprehensible, we ought not upon that account to conclude that they are false, but with the greatest reason to submit to the authority of God, who has revealed them.

And, indeed, however men may pretend to rail at the belief of mysteries, not all the wit of man has ever yet been able to produce a scheme of salvation, which has so well provided for the honour of God, and the harmony of his attributes, as the Gospel dispensation. For the atonement which a crucified Saviour made for the sins of mankind, at the same time, shewed the displeasure of God to sin, that it procured

his pardon and forgiveness of it to men. Here mercy and justice met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other. Under this gracious covenant of promise, we have this comfort and assurance, that though we cannot ourselves make any atonement for our sins, and though our best works are imperfect, yet, through faith in the merits of him who died for us, and sincere repentance, the one will be pardoned, and the other accepted. For now there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: For God is the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus, to whom his faith is counted for righteousness, and that freely, by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

But, 2dly, Lest the mercy of God in this dispensation should be abused by the presumptuous pretensions of wicked men, as if faith alone was sufficient to procure pardon of sins, the Apostle commands us "to hold this mystery of the "faith in a pure conscience;" that is, to live agreeably to our christian profession. And accordingly, in St. James, and many other parts of scripture, it is expressly declared, that faith is no otherwise saving, than as it is an active principle, and exerts itself in good works; that not

not the bare belief of this mystery, not all the invocations of Lord, Lord; not the preaching or doing wonderful things in his name, can avail us any thing, unless we also do the will and obey the commands of our Father, which is in heaven. Obedience and a good life are required of us under the law of grace, as well as under the law of nature; only with this difference, that repentance will be accepted under this law, through faith in the merits of our Redeemer, instead of that perfect obedience, which the law of nature required: and our faith is so far from weakening the cause of virtue and morality, as some have impiously fancied, that it encourages and promotes it, in the highest manner possible. For surely the greater obligation we are under to God for the pardon of our sins, the more we ought, on the one hand, to fly and abhor them, and on the other, to love and adore him; which will naturally lead us to a life of purity and holiness.

Did God then suffer his Son to come into the world, to lead a persecuted life, and suffer an ignominious death, that he might atone for our transgressions; and can we sufficiently admire this great condescension? Can the purest saint upon earth presume to think, that he has made an equal return to God for this vast obligation?

Are all the good acts we are capable of performing, any more than our reasonable service; and was not that obedience due to God before our redemption, for our creation, for our daily preservation and support? But that we are redeemed from misery, and restored to the happiness we had forfeited, are additional blessings, and altogether acts of divine grace and bounty. Ought we not, therefore, to make the most grateful acknowledgments for these benefits received, which our best services can never repay? And which way can we make a proper acknowledgment for these benefits, but by ascribing the purchase of them not to our own, but the merits of Christ, and by doing such works, as will make our faith in those merits be imputed to us for righteousness? Did it require so great an atonement as the sacrifice of the Son of God, to expiate our sins? How ought our abhorrence and aversion to those sins to rise in proportion? How ought we to dread violating those laws, to the breach of which eternal death is annexed for the penalty; and how thankful ought we to be to God, who has given us the means to escape it? Since then, as far as reason can judge, we have no assurance of the pardon of our sins, without believing in the merits of a crucified Saviour, let us reverence and adore this great mystery of our redemption, and hold fast the profession

profession of our faith without wavering. And, since faith without works is dead, let us carefully maintain and defend the honour of our profession, by virtue and good works, by "holding "the mystery of faith in a pure conscience."

SERMON XXXVII.

PSALM cxviii. 8.

It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.

YET how unwilling are the greater part of mankind to seek for this support against the evils of life, and how ready are they to seek for other methods of warding off the misfortunes to which they are liable.

So many are the changes and chances of this mortal life, so grievous the difficulties and dangers we are destined to encounter in this vale of tears, that the unsupported weakness of human nature must ever find itself unable to sustain them. Hence it is, that in times of distress and affliction all men naturally flee for help, and endeavour to seek refuge from the evils that surround them. Nor are the supports on which they depend less various, than the miseries from which

they fly. Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses; some rely on riches, or the consolations of human strength or friendship; others take shelter under the specious arguments of human wisdom and vain philosophy. These, and such like, are the broken reeds of comfort, to which men, in all ages, have had recourse for help in the day of trouble.

Amidst this perplexing uncertainty of vain hopes and deceitful expectations, the Royal Psalmist wisely undertakes to direct our wandering steps, and points out a fountain of comfort, which can never fail or deceive us. And who was better able than the Royal Psalmist to give us this information? He had felt all the miseries that mortal man is heir to, he had tried all the consolations which human strength can afford; and, after all, declares, as the result of his latest and best experience, "that it is better to trust "in the Lord, than to put any confidence in "man."

This declaration I shall endeavour to illustrate by a consideration of the following particulars:

First, That man can be no true object of trust and confidence.

Secondly,

Secondly, That God is such an inexhaustible fountain of power and goodness, that he can never fail those who put their trust in him.

That man cannot be a proper object of confidence, will be evident from the slightest survey of human nature and its leading principles. His will, which is the great spring of all his actions, is ever fickle and inconstant in all its propensities and aversions, not only driven about with every sudden gust of humour or passion, but even attached by secret likings and inexplicable sympathies, and alienated and estranged by as sudden and unaccountable hatreds and antipathies. What dependance then can there be on that which is scarce a moment the same, which is seldom in our own power, and at all times deceitful above all things?

Nor is this perverse fluctuation of the human will to be controlled by any laws, or restrained by the strongest tyes and obligations we can lay upon it. For how often do we see the parent abandon the child, for whom he is bound by the laws of nature to provide; abandon him without remorse, to danger, calamity, or death; and how often, again, does the child as unfeelingly trample under foot the sacred bonds of gratitude and filial duty? And if these, whom the most

most cogent laws of God and nature have appointed for a mutual comfort and support, can yet fail and deceive each other, what trust or confidence can we repose in the help of man, when he is bound by no laws, or inclined only by the weaker repulses of gratitude or friendship, to relieve us?

Should so plain a point as this still want confirmation, read the history of mankind, and you will soon be convinced, how little faith is due to the common professions of friendship and esteem. Whilst fortune smiles upon us, and our tables are crowned with riches and plenty, we shall not want numbers to devote themselves to our service, and declare themselves, like the faithless Peter, even ready to die with us: but let the providence of God change the scene, and scatter the blessings he had poured upon us, then, like Peter also, will they be ready with an oath to deny us. Their protestations of service will then be changed into frivolous excuses, and we shall be left to mourn our folly in putting any confidence in man.

But let me not be misunderstood. I mean not here to depreciate the value of true friendship, which every reasonable man is bound to honour, as the noblest balm of life, which God hath bestowed

bestowed in compassion to the manifold infirmities of our nature. But I must at the same time observe, and, I fear, the experience of too many will confirm the observation, that he, who flatters himself with the hopes of enjoying this blessing, will find by long trial, that as it is more precious, so also it is more difficult to be acquired than gold, yea than much fine gold.

But even should we succeed in our persuit of this inestimable treasure, how far are we still from having obtained any security against the various ills that surround us in life! The hand of friendship may indeed be stretched forth to relieve and support us; but our calamities also may be beyond the reach of human aid. Can even our dearest friends restrain the storm that lays waste our grounds, or stop the lightning from heaven that may blast us in a moment? Can they command the sun to chear, or the breeze to refresh us? Can they relieve the breast that throbs with the violence of a fever, or ease the head that sinks with unutterable anguish? Can they stop the raging fire that alarms our midnight slumbers, and in a moment swallows up our lives and fortunes? Can they support the feeble knee, revive the broken heart, or stay the chill cold hand of death? Alas! the power of man is, like his existence, short and limited.

Omni-

Omnipotence and all-sufficiency are to be found in God alone, from whom all things are derived. Even the noblest works of his hands are so far from being able to afford help to others in every time of need, that even themselves too often groan under the weight of evils which they can neither redress nor alleviate.

If, therefore, we would secure to ourselves a firm and unchangeable support, we must not rely on the arm of flesh, but on the power of God; since there are a thousand accidents in life, in which the services of our best friends can be of no avail to relieve us.

But, even allowing that men should be at all times both willing and able to relieve us, yet still there is another consideration, which ought to wean us from putting too great trust in them. We should remember that man that is born of a woman is of few days: his being is momentary and uncertain; in the beautiful language of scripture he is justly said to be "cut down like "a flower of the field; to flee as a shadow and "continue not." The soul and body, in whose union life consists, are held together by no stronger tye than the breath of our nostrils; a breath which a blast of air or shower of rain may extinguish; and then fall the stoutest and the bravest

bravest of the sons of men. Wisely, therefore, said the Prophet, "Cease ye from man, whose "breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he "to be accounted of? Put not your trust in "princes, nor in any child of man, for there is "no help in them; for, when the breath of man "goeth forth, he shall turn again to the earth, "and then all his thoughts perish:" all his wealth and pomp, his designs and contrivances perish with him, and he has no more a portion in any thing that is done under the sun. How then can he help others, who is no longer capable of helping himself? Or how shall he not deceive our expectations and confidence, when he is so miserably and so often deceived in his own?

Such then, and so frail, is the confidence we place in man! Let us see, therefore, whether it will not be better to trust in the Lord, who is such an inexhaustible fountain of power and goodness, that he can never fail or deceive us. Let us reflect on the excellence of all his attributes, and consider whether these do not render him the best and only fit object of full trust and assurance in all the dangers of this tempestuous ocean of life.

The love of man is partial and narrow, confined within the narrow circle of his own friends

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and companions, or cramped by the baser fetters of interest or advantage: but the love of God is unconfined and universal: his tender mercies are over all his works, and, like the beams of the sun, scatter bounty and blessings over the whole creation. The love of man is inconstant and uncertain; may be alienated by needless jealousies, or lost by false suspicions: but God is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever: in him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning: his affections cannot change, unless we drive them from us by our own obstinacy and sinfulness; and even then he does not entirely cast away his love from us, but endeavours by all gentle and endearing marks of kindness, to reclaim and reform us. And if we return to him with humble and truly penitent hearts, he willingly blots out our past transgressions, and the arms of his mercy are ever open to receive us, though, like the prodigal in the Gospel, we have squandered our portion with riotous living. If God then hath thus loved the world in all ages, we can have no doubt, but that he will ever be ready to promote our happiness, and to comfort and support those who flee to him for succour. And this also he is the better able to do from the superiority of his wisdom and knowledge.

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The children of men are ever lost in mazes, and perplexed with errors: the clouds and darkness of ignorance ever rest upon their best designs: so that they can neither clearly discern the dangers of life, nor certainly point out the means of redressing them. But God, who is light, distinctly beholdeth all things past, present, and to come, and by him all things are foreseen, determined, and conducted to their respective ends and purposes. We form not the most secret wish in our hearts but he knoweth it altogether; we fall not into the most hidden danger, but it is present to his all-seeing eye. There is not the least circumstance, that may be improved to our advantage, can escape his notice. So that, in all conditions, we may rest assured, that as he perfectly knoweth our wants, so also his wisdom will direct him to the most proper and effectual means for our comfort and support. For, to use the expressive words of inspiration, "he is a God of knowledge, and by "him actions are weighed."

Again: The power of men is limited and of small extent, so that they cannot always afford the help and assistance they are willing to do. But as for our God, he is in heaven, he hath done whatsoever pleased him. His almighty arm is not stopped by any resistance, disabled by any

casualties, or straitened by any time. That voice, which first raised man from the dust, can also raise him from the brink of destruction, can support him under all his afflictions, and guard him from all evil. Well, therefore, said the Prophet, "trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the "Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Fear "thou not, for I am with thee, be not dis-"mayed, for I am thy God."

Another strong consideration to engage us to trust in God, is his eternity.

We want no proof that the life of man is short. The graves of our friends, and the mouldering monuments of mortality, which are spread around us in this sacred place, too strongly proclaim this solemn truth. Whilst we have these before us, we cannot but be sensible of the justice of those various comparisons, which are used in scrrpture to remind us of the shortness of our existence: that our days are a span long; that we flee like a shadow and continue not; that we wither like grass, and fade as a flower of the field.

But life is one of God's unchangeable prerogatives; which all other beings derive from him, and hold only during his pleasure. He alone

has life in and from himself, and his existence alone is measured not by time but by eternity. Hence he is stiled in scripture "the high and "lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity," "who "liveth for ever," "whose years fail not," and "whose remembrance endureth throughout all "generations." What greater comfort then canst thou require, O child of mortality, than that which Moses pronounced as the greatest blessing to the tribe of Jeshurun: "Underneath "thee are the everlasting arms: the eternal God "is thy refuge?"

But, lest any doubt should still remain upon our minds; lest we should still be disquieted in vain; God hath even condescended to engage himself by the most solemn promises never to leave or forsake those who put their trust in him. He hath assured us, that he will be the helper of the friendless, the supporter of the poor and needy, the comforter of the broken hearted, and will, in all situations, give us what is requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul. "Hast thou not known," saith he; "hast thou "not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, "the creator of heaven and earth fainteth not, "neither is weary? He giveth power to the "faint, and to them that have no might he "increaseth strength. Even the youths shall

" faint and be weary, and the young men shall
" utterly fall.

" But they that wait upon the Lord, shall
" renew their strength; they shall mount up
" with wings as eagles; they shall run and not
" be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

And, if we look at the generations of old, and the years that are past, we shall find that he hath ever fulfilled these promises to his faithful servants, we shall find none that trusted in the Lord and were confounded, or that abode in his fear and were forsaken. " I will never leave
" thee nor forsake thee," said God to Joshua; and in him to all that rely upon him, in every age of the world. With how heavy a load of afflictions did the Royal Psalmist labour; with what a variety of misfortunes was he surrounded; dispossessed of his crown; persecuted by his own son, and even despised by those very subjects, whom his prudence and valour had saved from destruction! Yet, amidst this complication of distresses, with what a noble fortitude did he cleave to his God; and by what astonishing acts of providence did that God reward his fidelity and perseverance! How amazingly, again, did the same God exert his providential care in the deliverance and remuneration of his faithful ser-

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vant Job! And how instructive an example does his conduct hold forth to our imitation! We behold him, in one moment, lord of the east; the father of a numerous offspring; possessed of every blessing which man could wish or heaven bestow. In the next, we see him blasted by the vengeance of heaven, a spectacle of horror, an object of compassion! Himself smitten with the pains of a diseased body; his cattle and servants destroyed by the sword of his enemies, and by fire from heaven; and even his children, those last and dearest comforts of his declining years, all, all in one cruel moment torn from him by a sudden and unexpected death! Whither then, in this dark night of affliction, amid this concentration of unspeakable miseries, did this holy sufferer flee for succour, or in whom did he place his confidence? Not in the help of man, but in the mercy of that God, who ruleth on high. "O earth," says he, "cover not thou my blood, "and let my cry have no place: behold! my "witness is in heaven, and my record is on "high; my friends scorn me, but mine eye "poureth out tears unto God."

And what then was the event of this pious resignation; what the effect of this humble dependence upon the goodness of the Almighty? "Stand still, and consider the wondrous works

"of God." His mourning was changed into joy; his health restored; his possessions doubled; and to complete his happiness he lived to see a numerous offspring sharers of those blessings with which the bounty of God had rewarded his faith and integrity. So that, in all respects, his latter end, as the sacred historian declares, was more blessed than his beginning.

Since then, my brethren, we have a God who is thus ever ready to save those who flee unto him; by whose goodness we are upheld; by whose immensity of love and mercy we are surrounded; whose infinite wisdom enables him to plan, and whose infinite power enables him to execute the fittest means for our safety and happiness; what remains, but that we commit ourselves to his all-gracious guidance, and repose our souls under the shadow of his protecting wings? Under all the afflictive events of Providence, let us withdraw our minds from worldly helps; let us take off that confidence we are apt to place in men; and look up to God, the rock of ages, in a pious hope and assurance of his assistance. To him we have been left ever since we were born, and he has not hitherto forsaken us, but has preserved us in such a condition, as his wisdom thought most fitting and convenient for us. Let, therefore, our past experience of his directing providence beget in us a hope for the

the future, that as he has thus far conducted us in safety through the mazes of life, so also he will still continue to be our guide unto death.

Examine thyself, therefore, O sinner, whether thou hast that trust in God, which is the foundation of all comfort here, and the presage of eternal happiness hereafter? Hast thou not made gold thy hope, and said to the fine gold thou art my confidence? Hast thou not said to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister? Hast thou not trusted in them who dwell in houses of clay, when the terrors of God set themselves in array against thee; or sought help from man, whose foundation is in the dust, when the arrows of the Almighty made thee afraid? Does thy heart never reproach thee with having forsaken God, or does thy conscience never accuse thee of despising his mercies? Didst thou never in prosperity overlook the providence that bestowed, or in adversity neglect the hand that inflicted it upon thee? Didst thou never on the bed of sickness repine at thy Maker, or in the night of distress forget the Lord thy Redeemer? These, my brethren, are important questions, which unless a man can answer satisfactorily, let him not presume to call himself a christian, or fancy, that he has that trust in God, which is the foundation of all re-

ligion. Pause, therefore, for a few moments; lay your hands upon your hearts, and consider seriously, whether ye are indeed possessed of this inestimable treasure. Delay not to trust in the Lord, before it be too late; flee unto the Almighty for succour, whilst yet he may happily be found. Take for your example the saints and martyrs of ancient times, who, trusting in the Lord, despised the dangers and difficulties of this uncertain span of life, and now through faith and patience inherit the promises. To them pain and disease, shame and reproach, poverty and distress, nay even death itself appeared light and easy, as being the appointment of that Being in whom they trusted, that he would raise them up to immortality at the last day. And the same promises, which were made to them, are also made to you: the same God, which was their support, shall be also your comfort; and the same immortality, which was their hope, shall also be your reward.

But finally, my beloved, as ye imitate their hopes and confidence in God, so also be careful to follow those graces and virtues, which were the foundation of that hope and confidence. For though the Almighty be a sure anchor of trust and safety, amidst the waves of this troublesome world; yet he is so to those alone, whose

whose hands are pure, and whose hearts are undefiled. Though the crown of glory be laid up in the heavens, yet it is laid up for those alone, who fight the good fight of faith, and finish their course with a patient continuance in well doing.

Whilst then, with hearts resigned to the divine will, we bow the knee to God; whilst, with hopes full of immortality, we lift the eye of faith to heaven; let us not forget to follow peace on earth, and cultivate good will towards men. Whilst in the day of distress we stretch forth our hands for help to the Father of mercies, let us not deny mercy to our fellow-beings; whilst in the hour of affliction, we implore consolation from the Lord of life, let us not refuse comfort to those who are in misery and the shadow of death.

Thus shall we be indeed followers of those, who have gone before us in the Christian race; thus shall we be a blessing to mankind; thus shall we secure to ourselves a never-failing support here, and at that awful moment, when the springs of life fail, shall be received into the everlasting arms of that God, in whom we have trusted.

SER-

SERMON XXXVIII.

LUKE XV. 11, 12, 13.

And he said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

"ALL scripture," we are told, "is given "by inspiration of God, and is profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for "instruction in righteousness." And perhaps no part of scripture more eminently abounds with each of these, than the parable now read to you: which, therefore, I have made choice of, as containing useful instruction for the younger part of my audience; that if there should

should be any so unfortunate as neither to be awed by precept, nor restrained by advice, they may at least be warned by example, of the fatal and inevitable consequences of youthful vices and early debauchery.

Nor let any one think it strange that I should so frequently address myself to young persons from this place. Experience shews, that those whose minds and manners have long been tainted with vice, are seldom reclaimed, till misfortune, age, or sickness, dispose them to listen to the sober voice of reason. But they, who are either yet wholly untainted with sin, or at least stand trembling on the brink of iniquity, will sometimes feel the force of a well-intended reproof; may sometimes be taught the superior beauty of innocence and integrity; to value the approbation of God more than the applause of a wicked companion; to think it a higher satisfaction to give joy and comfort to the declining years of an anxious parent, than to revel in the scenes of midnight pleasure, or to celebrate the orgies of nocturnal debauchery; in a word, to think it more amiable to be the prop and consolation of age-worn infirmity, than to bring down gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.—"A certain man had two sons." See here how happiness is ever entwined and chequered with misery!

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how blessings and sorrows are inseparable companions, and attend us in every stage and circumstance of life! He had but two sons; and yet from so small a number he found a painful dagger planted in his heart. The one was amiable and obedient: was every thing which a father's fondness could wish: who never transgressed his will at any time. But the other, —painful to say!—was a melancholy reverse of all this: a disobedient and dissolute child, whose early years prognosticated nothing but affliction to his parents, and ruin and infamy to himself: who, unable to brook the necessary restraints of paternal wisdom, breaks out into the hasty and petulant request in the text, "Father, give me "the portion of goods that falleth to me!"—Too natural a description of rash and inconsiderate youth;—He had no reason to complain of the treatment he met with in his father's house: the good old man, like a kind parent, granted his request without complaining, and received him at his return with tears of joy: he could not therefore be a harsh or churlish father, who drove him by unnecessary severity, or undue restraints, to make this imprudent request. Neither had the unthinking youth himself yet formed any designs of lewdness and debauchery, to lead him to it. He was only weary of living under his father's watchful eye, and tired of the

necessary

necessary restraints imposed by the wisdom of riper years: he thought himself wise enough to be his own manager; perhaps, too, he might think the life of an ancient parent protracted a little too long; he wished therefore to be master of his own fortune, and at liberty to persue his own inclinations: he therefore cries out, "Father, give me the portion of goods that "falleth to me!"

And is not this a very natural picture of the usual rashness of that inconsiderate age? Educated under the protection of a father's watchful care, indulged with all the fondness of a mother's love, shielded from every danger, free from every care, supplied with every wish of reason, no sooner does the unthinking youth arrive at the verge of maturity, than he wants to throw off the guiding hand of authority, to have the portion of goods that falleth to him, and to rush, without experience to guard, or prudence to guide him, into all the dangers and temptations of an untried world.

Is not this also too much the case with all of us, considered as the children of our Father which is in heaven? He has watched over us for our good; he has guided our feet into the way of peace, by the light of reason and the voice of

of conscience; safety and happiness await us, so long as we remain under his authority here, and he has promised an eternal inheritance to those who are willing, through faith and patience, to inherit the promises. But the misfortune is, we soon grow weary of living under the discipline of our heavenly Parent: we complain that he has not enough consulted the desires and appetites of depraved nature: the laws of the Gospel are a restraint upon us, his commandments seem grievous: we want to persue our own inclinations, and live, as it is called, like the rest of the world: we therefore throw off the yoke of heavenly authority, and, like the young man in the parable, cry out, "Give me the "portion of goods," the share of worldly pleasure or profit, "that falleth to me."

And like him, too, the time which we generally take to throw off the authority of God, is that of youth: an age, in which we most want knowledge and experience; an age, in which we have the greatest reason to distrust ourselves, and not to take one step without the guidance of our heavenly Father; an age, in which the world smiles with all its flattering charms upon the ripe passions of youthful desire, and therefore is the most likely to seduce and overpower the

the feeble strength of unsuspecting innocence and unconfirmed virtue.

And let us observe what were the consequences of this unguarded impatience of restraint, this excessive fondness and love of liberty. No sooner did this inconsiderate youth declare, that he was weary of living under his father's direction and authority, and wished to have the management of his own time and fortune, than his hasty and foolish wish was complied with. His father, though assured that ruin would inevitably follow his compliance, yet, finding that his former advice had been thrown away, and well knowing the headstrong violence of determined folly, consents to his request, and divided his living between his two sons, that he might give to the younger the portion of goods that fell to him.

And in the same manner our almighty Parent deals with his unwise children. When he sees that we grow weary of his service, and are unwilling to obey his laws and submit to his discipline, he leaves us to ourselves, and in the hands of our own counsel; he suffers us to walk in the ways of our hearts, and in the sight of our eyes. He might, indeed, still compel us to obey his will and own his authority: but he

will not be satisfied with a forced and reluctant service: he requires the heart, he expects a free and willing obedience from us: and if we deny him this, he gives us our portion of goods, those pomps, pleasures, and vanities of the world, which we covet, and leaves us, like the youthful prodigal, to waste our substance in riotous living.

But let us see what followed upon this young man's obtaining his request.—"And not many "days after," says the text, "the younger son "gathered all together, and took his journey "into a far country." You see with what eagerness and haste he runs into the paths of ruin, and seeks to be undone: for not many days passed, before he thought of leaving his father's house. We may observe, too, the quick progress and gradation of sin, when the first breach is made. At first, he only proposed to have what was his own, and to secure the patrimony that fell to his share. But he no sooner obtained his request, than he begins to form new designs. He was not content with possessing the portion of goods that fell to him, but he wants to enjoy them too. As soon as he has the means of gratifying them, his passions become more turbulent and pressing. Here then is the painful struggle between a sense of duty

and the power of temptation, which generally decides the future fate of every young person in life. On the one hand, his riotous passions push him on to debauchery and extravagance; but on the other, shame and fear restrain him. A father's awful presence, perhaps too a mother's winning fondness, the wise and friendly lessons of both inculcated in early youth, the exemplary deportment of an elder brother, who never transgressed their commandment at any time, were not to be got over in a moment. Not daring, therefore, to give a loose to his unruly lusts at home, and wanting the virtuous resolution to subdue them, he forms and executes the hasty design of going into a far country, where he should have nobody to pry into or censure his irregular conduct: "He "gathered all together, and took his journey "into a far country."

Can there be a more lively image of the progress of every young sinner? At first, he wishes to remember his Creator in the days of his youth; at least, he has no design to go to the extremity of vice. He only proposes to enjoy his portion of goods, to live according to his natural disposition, and to give a little more liberty to his passions than is consistent with the severity of age, and the strictness of parental authority.

authority. By degrees, he begins to hope there is no harm in doing as others do, and following a multitude in what are called fashionable amusements. He flatters himself that God will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss, that the merits of Christ are extensive, that the plea of human infirmity is strong, that there will be time enough to repent, when the fire of youth has spent its rage, and, at the worst, that he is not worse than his neighbours, and therefore can but share the same fate. Thus by imperceptible gradations his sins grow familiar and increasing, and he commits them daily with less scruple and remorse of conscience.

However, the remains of religion are still for some time a restraint upon him. For a man who has been brought up in the fear of God, and has had a christian and virtuous education, cannot in a moment root out the good impressions he has received. His conscience will from time to time fly in his face, and remind him of those days of peace, when God was his friend, and innocence his companion. Perhaps, too, a heart-felt prayer or well-meant sermon, a lingering sickness, or the unlooked-for death of a companion in iniquity, may chance to stagger him for a few moments, and stop him in the career of vice.

But this is a state of violence, and therefore cannot last long. If it does not produce an immediate reformation, it will drive him on faster to ruin. If he has not the resolution to return to virtue, he will wish to lose the sight of it, which only serves to check and disturb him in his pleasures. Like the young man, therefore, in the parable, unable to bear the restraints of wisdom, he will take his journey into a far country: he will forsake God's house and his ordinances, he will avoid the company of good men, he will turn a deaf ear to all advice, he will fortify himself with the foolish notions of his licentious companions, he will laugh at every thing sober, decent, and religious, till his actions become correspondent to his principles, and he lives as if there was no God to see and judge his folly, no heaven to lose, no hell to fear.

If there be any unfortunate habitual sinner who hears me this day, I appeal, as in the presence of God and his holy angels, to his own conscience, whether this be not an exact description of his own case? Whether his first intention was not, only to take innocent freedoms, and comply with the customs of the world? Whether, if any one had charged him with an intention of committing those greater crimes

crimes which are now written deep in his conscience, he would not have answered in the language, though not in the sense, of Hazael, "Is "thy servant a dog, that he should do this "great sin?" Whether he has not, in the solemn silence of midnight, felt the stinging reproaches of awakened guilt; till, unable to bear the sore burden of his sins, he has fled for refuge to sottishness and stupefaction, to midnight riot and joyless mirth? Whether he has not endeavoured to stifle these uneasy feelings by departing into a far country, by shunning every thing serious and virtuous, that might remind him of his folly, or check him in his guilt? Whether he dreads not the house of his heavenly Father: whether the prayer of contrite devotion, the lessons of immortal wisdom, the arrows of ministerial reproof, the bread of life which we receive in remembrance of a dying Saviour; whether all these are not so many daggers to his soul, which he flies from, because his pain is greater than he can bear?—Such then was the folly of the young man in leaving his father's house; and such is the folly of every one who follows so dangerous and fatal an example!

You have seen, then, my younger brethren, the miserable consequences, which followed this young man's impatient haste to quit the guid-

ance and protection of a wise and experienced father. And be assured, that the same consequences will ever follow the rashness and indiscretion of youth, when left to its own guidance. The love of liberty is indeed natural to all, and most of all so to the fervid impetuosity of a youthful mind. It is too a glorious and commendable passion, when it is the child of order, and tempered with wisdom. But remember withal, that there is no wisdom in breaking down the fences of parental authority, and rushing, unprepared and unprotected, into a dangerous world. The God that has made you, has appointed your parents the natural guardians of your early years, and the proper judges of your conduct in life. Submit therefore always with cheerfulness to their wise and salutary directions. Be persuaded firmly, that experience has taught them that wisdom which you want, and that natural affection will lead them to apply it to your advantage. And even should they in some things,—for who is always wise?—so far forget themselves as unwisely to mistake your interest, or rashly misjudge your conduct; yet still there is a reverence due to them, which a good child will never forget. He will rather wish to overlook the conduct he cannot approve, and, like the pious sons of Noah, with averted eyes, to cover the failures of parental infirmity with the veil of filial respect.

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But, at the same time, remember, that it is much more likely that you should form a wrong judgment of their conduct, than that they should either mistake or misguide yours. It will therefore become you, on the one hand, not to entertain harsh suspicions against them on slender grounds, nor, on the other, to rely on the superiority of your own discernment without the strongest grounds.

And as it is your duty, as it is your interest, not to throw off the guidance of your earthly parents, so it is of still more importance not to reject the government of your heavenly Father. —There cannot be a greater curse than to be left to yourselves. You have seen this in the case of the young man in the text, and you will soon feel it in yourselves, if you are rash enough to make the experiment. Your temptations are strong, and your nature is weak: the heart is corrupt, passion is blind. They are therefore unfit guides; they will lead you far out of the road of happiness. The God who made you is alone able to guide you. Beware therefore of offending or deserting him. Rather submit yourselves wholly to his will and pleasure, and pray earnestly for his Holy Spirit in all things to direct and rule your hearts.

Lastly, Consider how much better it is to serve God from your youth up, than to be at last compelled to return to him in the decline of life, laden with sin and infirmity, after tasting the bitter husks of misery and humiliation. Remember therefore your Creator in the days of your youth, and devote to his service the untainted bloom of innocence, which is the noblest sacrifice you can offer. Resolve never to forfeit the glorious privilege of being born in the house of God, and under the blessed covenant of redemption from sin: rather let it be your first care to make the best use of that advantage, by preserving the good seed sown in your hearts. Read therefore the written word of God, meditate on the great works of his divine power in the dispensations of nature and providence, and hearken to his voice, when he speaks to you by your conscience, by his ministers, or the powerful language of divine grace. So will you see your goods prosper upon the earth; so will your faith and piety increase with your increasing years; and after having been a comfort to your parents and an ornament to religion in this world, you will one day be received into everlasting habitations, at the right hand of your Father which is in heaven.

SERMON XXXIX.

LUKE xv. 13—16.

And he took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields, to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him.

ST. Paul, reproaching the Romans with the shameful irregularity of their past conduct, very justly asks them, "What fruit had ye then "in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?" And the same question may, with equal justice, be asked of every imprudent and abandoned sinner. And what the true answer to this question must ever be, let the woeful experience of the young man in my text declare, whose imprudent conduct I have on a former occasion endeavoured

deavoured to describe to you in plain and artless language, to deter the young and unthinking from persuing the dangerous paths of error and ruin. So long as he remained under the guidance of a wise and kind father, and followed the path of his duty, he was happy, because he was innocent: but no sooner did he shake off the yoke of parental authority, and abandon himself to debauchery, than distress and shame followed, and he was reduced to the lowest state of poverty and misery: for, as the Apostle well adds, "the "end of those things is death."

It appears that this unhappy young man set no bounds to his youthful excesses. For the word made use of in the original * to describe his conduct, is expressive of the most abandoned debauchery and extravagance. And of what kind this debauchery and extravagance was, we are told by his elder brother, who reproaches him with "having devoured his living with harlots." Here then we see the fatal rock, upon which the virtue of unguarded youth is ever in danger of being shipwrecked. Captivated by the syren tongue of beauty, and ensnared by the woman "which forsaketh the guide of her youth and "the covenant of her God," he soon forgot all the instructive lessons of an aged father, and the

* Ασώτως.

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improving example of a faultless elder brother. Lost to his country, lost to his friends, to his interest, to every thing that was manly, wise, and virtuous, he slumbered on in the lap of pleasure, till the voice of distress awaked him to shame and remorse;—to tell him that he had spent his all;—that the gripe of famine was ready to seize him, and to bring him down to the chambers of death.

In the fate of this unthinking prodigal, then, let every young man see, as in a glass, the unavoidable consequences of lawless lust and ungoverned passion. Let him be assured from the experience of all ages, that there is not a surer, there is not a more direct road to absolute ruin, and that the wise king of Israel spake the language of unerring truth, when he said, that "by means of a whorish woman a man is brought "to a piece of bread." Suffer me therefore to address you all in the affectionate language of the same wise king, "Hearken unto me now "therefore, O ye children, and attend to the "words of my mouth. Let not thine heart "decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. "For her house is the way to hell, going down "to the chambers of death." And here I cannot but take occasion to remark, and at the same time sincerely to lament, that mass of folly

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and obscenity which is circulated through every part of the kingdom in indecent prints and publications, replete with danger and ruin to the youthful part of both sexes. For sure I am, that nothing can tend more fatally to inflame the passions and corrupt the minds of young persons, and prepare them for the commission of every species of destructive debauchery. And at the best, had they no worse tendency, even the most harmless of them fill the mind with frivolity, enervate the powers of the understanding, and generate an unaptness in young minds to apply to what is serious, manly, and best deserving of attention and regard.

But let us proceed in our history of this inconsiderate prodigal.—"When he had spent all, "there arose a mighty famine in that land, and "he began to be in want."

See here the mistaken folly of youthful minds! When they first enter upon the career of vice, they think that it is strewed with pleasures, with the rose-buds of the spring, and will reward them for the loss of their innocence by a thousand enjoyments. But how great and fatal is the mistake! The prodigal thought that in a remote country, far from the intruding eye of censure, and the painful restraint of parental authority, he

he should enjoy an uninterrupted flow of happiness. But he soon found that his hopes were visionary, and his expected enjoyments "like "a dream when one awaketh:" but that the misery which surrounded him was real; that he was exposed, friendless and deserted, to the substantial evils of hunger and thirst, and nakedness.

And is not the case the same with those, who quit the house of their heavenly Father, in pursuit of worldly happiness? How many are there, who have lived at ease under God's protecting care, who were plentifully fed with the bread of his word, admitted to his table, and treated as the children of his love, but, by unhappily departing from him, have lost all these privileges, have fallen into spiritual want and poverty of soul, and have lingered out their miserable lives in a total neglect of all religious duties, and in a sottish ignorance of the way to happiness? To these unhappy men we may justly apply what Isaiah says to the unenlightened heathens, who sought for that true happiness in the writings of their philosophers, which is to be found in God alone:—"Wherefore do ye spend money for "that which is not bread, and your labour for "that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently "unto me, and eat that which is good, and let "your soul delight itself in fatness."—In short,

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it is only by obeying God and continuing in his house, that we can find the true bread of life, which cometh down from heaven. So long as we continue there, we find peace of conscience, satisfaction of mind, the pardon of our sins, and eternal happiness: but the moment we depart from it, like the rash prodigal, we fall into misery and want,—misery and want of all the greatest, —the misery of a guilty conscience, and the want of God's comfort and protection.

When the prodigal was reduced to this distressful situation, "he went," says our Saviour, "and joined himself to a citizen of that country, "and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." —Such is ever the behaviour of profligate young men. When their vices and follies have brought them to a state of wretchedness, instead of taking the wise course of repentance and reformation, they seek out for new expedients to support them in their desperate courses; they join themselves to companions more wicked than themselves, and submit to the basest arts of dishonesty and meanness.

Such too is the behaviour of us all, in respect to our great Master in heaven. We think, if we can but keep at a distance from God, and return no more to the yoke of religion, that we have gained

gained our point, and are in a state of perfect freedom. We consider not, that by leaving God and submitting to worldly lusts, we have forsaken a master whose service is perfect freedom, to be slaves to those hard and dreadful tyrants, the world, the flesh, and the devil; who will put us to basest and vilest employments, and, in our Saviour's phrase, will send us out into the field to feed swine.

Lastly, To put the finishing stroke to the prodigal's wretchedness, "he would fain have filled "his belly with the husks that the swine did "eat, and no man gave unto him."—Miserable state of humiliation indeed! for him who was born to a plentiful fortune, and educated under all the tenderness of an indulgent parent, to envy the very food of those vile animals, and to find no man charitable enough to appease his hunger! But such is ever the end of sin and folly. As our wickedness increases, our misery increases with it. We may promise to ourselves all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them too; but so long as we remain in a far country, so long as we are strangers to God and religion, we shall find nothing but disappointment and woe; we shall covet the vile husks of sensual pleasures, and shall at last find no man to give them unto us; instead of enjoyment, we shall

shall find a broken constitution and ruined fortune, a guilty conscience and an offended God.

From what has been said we may learn, that nothing is more shameful and debasing than sin. It is contrary to the dignity and excellence of our nature, and that glory which God has reserved for us. For why has he given us an understanding to know him, laws to direct our conduct, a will to obey them, and an immortal soul capable of everlasting happiness, but with a design to make us holy and happy, to deliver us from the miseries of sin, to lead us to an imitation of his virtues, and to reward us with an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that "fadeth not away." This was doubtless the end which God proposed to himself in placing us in the world, and revealing himself to us in the Gospel; and we ought to omit nothing to preserve such inestimable privileges. But if we give up ourselves to sin, it will deprive us of all these high honours and dignities, it will degrade us from that rank to which God has raised us, disfigure that glorious image which Christ came to renew in us, and reduce us to all the baseness of degenerate and corrupt nature,—to the husks of sordid and irrational swine.

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We may, secondly, from hence learn, that sin is likewise the source of numberless troubles, miseries, and distresses, which, sooner or later, never fail of being the portion of those, who follow its guidance. The world, indeed, and especially the younger part of it, have a different way of thinking. They promise themselves a thousand pleasures in the indulgence of their passions. But this is only the effect of ignorance and youthful inexperience: reason and maturer age will teach them a very different lesson. We are all of us indeed apt to form too favourable an opinion of vice, from seeing the wicked too often apparently happy in the world. But this is one of those false judgments, into which we are led by the imperfection of our nature, which sees not beyond the surface of things.—Could we strip the sinner, however prosperous, of all disguise; could we, like the Almighty, search into his heart, and see what passes within; could we be witness to the fears, inquietudes, and anxieties, which wound his soul, which make him start and look pale at midnight; we should soon change our opinion, and conclude, in the language of the prophet, "There is no peace to "the wicked."

But though we cannot see the hearts of others, we may at least see our own, and there read the

fate of guilt. Look back, therefore, into your own breasts, and say, whether upon the commission of any bad action, you have not felt a pain and shame, which no pleasure can compensate, no time can heal? Say, ye whose consciences write bitter things against you, whether any enjoyment can make up the loss of your innocence? whether ye do not look back with regret upon those days, when your souls were white and spotless, and wish that you could recall those moments, when innocence was your companion and God your friend? And what you feel in yourselves as the consequences of guilt, be assured that every other sinner feels, let his outward appearance or demeanour be what it will.

But after all, should we allow that there is the greatest pleasure and satisfaction in sin; yet it can never make amends for those eternal miseries, which all the workers of iniquity will one day suffer. They cannot forget, if they would, that "the wages of sin is death;" not only that temporal death, which they are hastening on by their debaucheries and excess, but death eternal. They cannot forget, that unceasing torments, and the blackness of darkness await them for evermore. Little, therefore, will it avail them, that they have enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season,

reason, if they must at last pay for them the heavy price of eternal condemnation.

If, therefore, my young friends, you would avoid the misery and distresses of the prodigal son, flee those vices which brought them upon him,—a disobedience to parental authority, an indulgence in youthful lusts, and riotous living. You have, on the one hand, every possible inducement to fear God and keep his commandments;—your own credit and success in the world, the comfort of your family and friends, and the hopes of eternal salvation. And, on the other hand, what is there wanting to deter you from the ways of sin? What can be added to the displeasure of God and the contempt of man, the certainty of present shame and future misery? If these are not sufficient, vain will be every other argument. It only remains for me to commit you to the mercy of that all-powerful Being, who is able in a moment to turn the hearts of the disobedient, to the wisdom of the just, when every human hope and effort fails of success.

Think not, however, that I mean to tie you down to the impossible task of a sinless obedience: No: to sin and to suffer are the two unavoidable conditions of humanity; and we must cease to be men before we can cease to be poor

and miserable sinners. The wisest of us all have much to be forgiven: and yours especially is an age ever accompanied with levity and indiscretion. But the God, who made us, knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust: He will not therefore require from you the spotless purity of angels:—the worm cannot reach the strength of the lion, nor the snail contend in swiftness with the eagle.

But though we must be sinners, it is not necessary that we should be wilful and habitual sinners. All, therefore, I wish to recommend to you, is, to make religion and virtue the great principle and line of your duty through life. Upon them fix the plan of your conduct, and, as far as humanity will allow, endeavour to execute it. And then though in some things ye may offend, and though in others ye may be exposed to the unmerited censure and condemnation of the world; yet God, who seeth your hearts, and knoweth the intentions and integrity of them, will one day justify you before men and angels.

SERMON

SERMON XL.

LUKE xv. 17—20.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father.

I HAVE on former occasions represented to you the precipitate folly of the prodigal in leaving his father's house, and the heavy miseries which befel him in consequence of it. My present business shall be to examine, what use he made of his afflictions; that every young libertine, who begins to see the error of his ways, may, by his example, learn what course he ought to take to wash out his sins, and regain the favour of his God.

And first, "He came to himself." He was not therefore himself before. He awaked as out of a deep sleep or lethargy; he arose, as it were, from the dead, and was restored to new life. This is a just description of the state of a sinner. He is buried in a lethargic sleep; he is dead to reason and virtue; he has no sense of God and religion. And under this image flagrant sinners are frequently represented in the Gospel. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the Ephesians before their conversion to Christianity tells them, "Ye were "dead in trespasses and sins." And agreeably to this, the work of repentance is called an awaking out of sleep, a sort of resurrection from the grave:—"Awake, thou that sleepest; arise "from the dead, and Christ shall give thee "light."

Again. "He came to himself:" he recovered the use of his reason and understanding; he was restored to spiritual life. The young and inconsiderate think it not so; but let the wiser voice of age and experience tell them, what they will one day find to be true, that sin is a state of madness; it is a contradiction to all reason and wisdom: it is giving up the enjoyments of a man for the pleasures of a brute: it is exchanging health for sickness: it is buying a momentary enjoyment at the expence of an eternity of pain.

pain. Can there be greater madness? Can there be stronger proof of the decay of reason? Nothing therefore but a kind of miracle can recover the sinner from this deplorable state of phrenzy. That God, who opens the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, can alone remove the mists of clouded reason. And when he is pleased to do this, by sickness or affliction, by the voice of conscience or the terrors of impending judgment, then the sinner comes to himself; the dead man rises, and begins to shew signs of life; the poor madman recovers his reason, and sees the circle of folly, in which his days have passed. Here then is the first step to a recovery. But let him not think, that this coming to himself consists in a superficial review of his past life, or a few slight reflections upon his present condition. There are many, indeed, who think they are come to themselves, if they make some general reflections upon their conduct, are sorry for their irregularities, and resolve to be better, if they can, for the future. I would not discourage any man in his design of returning to God: even the dawnings of repentance are better than the inveteracy of unfeeling guilt: but let no man deceive himself with this general and superficial sort of repentance. To come to himself to any purpose, a man must call his ways to remembrance carefully and diligently: he must

consider his former course of life, and compare it with the unerring touchstone of the word of God; he must not judge of his conduct lightly, or ask how it will appear in the sight of men like himself; but how it will appear, naked and undisguised, before a just God, at the last great day: he must therefore search into the secret corners of his heart, he must drag forth to view every secret and lurking iniquity, he must mark every deviation from duty, and endeavour also, where he roots out a vice, to plant a virtue in its room.

This is the true work of repentance. Let me not, however, be understood, that these precautions are at all times necessary, or required equally from all men. If there be a happy few, who, like the eldest son in the parable, have continued in their father's house, and never transgressed his will at any time; who have nothing to charge themselves with but sins of infirmity, ignorance, or surprize; to them the work of repentance certainly lies in a narrower compass, and is attended with less pain and remorse. But the prodigal, whose life has been attended with a long succession of iniquities, must pass through all the bitter stages of contrition, if he ever hopes to taste the sweet fruits of a quiet conscience and a reconciled God; the

the assurance of forgiveness, and the hopes of immortality.

The first thing which comes into the mind of the prodigal, after his coming to himself, is the peace and plenty he once enjoyed in his father's house;—"How many hired servants," says he, "of my father have bread enough and to spare, "and I perish with hunger!"—Hitherto he had felt no regret for leaving his father; he was happy in having got his liberty, in having no spy upon his actions; in giving a loose to all his youthful and wicked inclinations: but hunger and thirst are friendly monitors: nakedness and famine are kind instructors. When, therefore, he found himself exposed to the winds and rain of heaven, and pierced by the sharp cravings of an unsatisfied appetite, he comes to himself; his eyes are opened, and the film of error removed. He calls to mind the tenderness of an indulgent father; he compares the happy hours he had spent under his protecting roof, where every wish of reason was supplied, with those sorrowful days he was now lingering out in poverty, disgrace, and servitude. And, in the midst of these reflections, he could not forbear envying the lot of his father's very servants, who, under the government of a mild and gentle master, enjoyed every accommoda-

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tion which the necessities of nature required, whilst he was denied the very husks which the swine did eat:—"How many hired servants of "my father have bread enough and to spare, "and I perish with hunger!"

Can there be a more natural reflection to shew us what passes in the soul of an habitual sinner, when he first begins to be sensible of his folly? So long as he is blinded by his passions and surrounded with pleasures, he neither thinks of God nor bewails the loss of the riches of his house, the pleasures and advantages of religion. But let sickness seize him, or adversity begin to rain afflictions upon his unsheltered head, then all these things rush into his mind: then grief, shame, and anguish of heart succeed the deceitful calm of sin: then he remembers the kindness and promises of his heavenly Father; he calls to mind those happy hours which he spent in his house, when he made the law of God his delight, when he was fed with the bread of angels at his altar, and joined in the fellowship of saints.—"Those blessed days," will the returning sinner cry, "are now past and gone! How therefore is my soul perplexed, and my conscience tormented! What difference do I now find between the state which I once knew, and that in which I now am! Blessed are they that

that dwell in thy house, and blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee! The meanest of thy servants enjoy more peace and satisfaction than I have done in following all the corrupt inclinations of my heart. I thought by departing from thee, that I should have found liberty and happiness; but my hopes were founded upon a broken reed, which has pierced my soul. Who then will restore that peace and innocence, which I have lost by my folly? What can speak comfort to my wounded soul? Who will assure me, that God has not forsaken me for ever, and will be no more entreated?"

Hearken, thou desponding sinner, to the voice of the returning prodigal, and from his example learn wisdom:—"Father, I have sinned "against heaven and before thee, and am not "worthy to be called thy son." He does not now think of returning to his friends and companions, or to his vices, but to his offended father. He had tried the folly of every other expedient, and therefore felt the necessity of this. Nor was his determination the hasty resolve of disappointed wickedness or jaded sensuality, but the result of conviction; after he came to himself, and knew that there was no peace to the wicked. He therefore makes no delay, but executes instantly the wise resolutions he

he had formed: "I will arise," says he, "and "go to my father. And he arose, and came to "his father."

The sinner, therefore, must not only come to himself, but he must also resolve to forsake his wicked courses, and immediately put his resolutions in execution. His must be the language of David, "I made haste, and prolonged not "the time to keep thy commandments." His heavenly Master invites him in those endearing words, "Come unto me, all that travel and are "heavy laden, and I will give you rest:" he must, therefore, accept the invitation without delay: he must arise and go to Christ.

The prodigal, we see, lost no time in executing the plan he had formed: he did not suffer his intentions to flag, or pretend to wait for a more convenient season. Neither the distance of the way, nor the hazard of the journey, nor the weakness of an emaciated body, nor the uncertainty of success, could abate his zeal, or shake his determined purpose: he loses not a moment, but begins his journey, as soon as he had formed the design of taking it. And in this he acted wisely: for had he suffered the warmth of resolution to cool, he might for ever have lost the fruit of those good desires, which God

God had put into his heart. Time and custom would have reconciled him to sin, and he would have grown callous and insensible to shame and remorse.

Let this, therefore, serve as a reproof to those, who are moved with the same wise thoughts and desires, but neglect to put them in practice; who imprudently let all those gracious opportunities slip, which a God of mercy offers them, of returning into the ways of righteousness. Great is the number of those, who say with the prodigal in the parable, "I will arise "and go to my father:" but their misfortune is, they stop here: they have always some excuse at hand, to put off the execution of their design: they dismiss their good intentions with the language of Felix to Paul, "Go thy way "for this time; when I have a more convenient "season, I will call for thee." Sometimes they plead the difficulty of conquering those evil habits, which have taken deep root in their hearts for many years: sometimes that trouble and vexation, which they foresee a change of life will cost them: sometimes they are withheld by shame, lest they should become the ridicule of their former companions in iniquity; and most generally a false trust in God's mercy, and a dangerous persuasion, that it will be soon enough

enough to return to him at the latter end of their life, supports them in the career of folly. Thus they have always some pretence for delaying that necessary work, which they can never begin too soon. And to these fatal excuses it is owing, I fear, that many a well-meaning man, who seriously intended to begin the work of repentance, but unhappily put it off from day to day, is now lamenting his misery, amidst the flames that cannot be quenched: for, by deferring repentance from day to day, zeal grows weak, and habitual sins strong.

The sinner says, like the prodigal, "I will "arise and go to my father;" I will forsake my love of the world, my drunkenness, pride, hatred, malice, and all my carnal lusts: but, alas! procrastination too soon steals away the powers of resolution, and he slides insensibly into his former habits: instead, therefore, of the sweet fruits of penitence, gloomy fear and anxious terror rack the soul with nightly and hourly apprehensions; vice and desperation occupy that breast, which might have been the lovely abode of virtue, with all her train of godlike pleasures; and, at length the unhappy sinner, in vain lifting up his hands to heaven for a continuance of that miserable existence, which he knows not how to endure, yet fears to quit, falls surrounded

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with those chains of sin, which his folly first forged, and his feeble efforts are now unable to break asunder.

The wise sailor will learn to shun the rock on which others have split.—Let their misfortune, therefore, be our warning. If any of us have unhappily fallen into the snare of sin, let us not delay the precious hours of repentance, but let us rather seek the Lord, whilst happily he may be found, and call upon him, whilst he is near. Be our's the decent and humble language of the returning prodigal, "Father, I have sinned "against heaven and before thee, and am no "more worthy to be called thy son." And then let us not doubt of the kind reception of the same prodigal:—"When he was yet "a great way off, his father saw him, and "had compassion on him, and fell on his "neck, and kissed him. And he said to his "servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put "it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and "shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted "calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry." What an affecting picture is this of the tenderness of the good old man! He knew too well the indiscretion of his son, and felt every consequence which that indiscretion had brought upon him. Yet, upon his return and acknowledgment of his offences, how readily does all the

the parent break forth in expressions of love and affection! He does not reproach him with his past follies, or remind him of the different conduct of his elder brother; he does not insinuate harsh suspicions of the sincerity of his present repentance, or distrust the integrity of his future conduct; but willing to believe that his sorrow was real, and his contrition the result of conviction, he instantly prepares every mark of honour and festivity, which could testify the most unfeigned joy.

See, then, ye, who have unhappily by your vices or follies alienated from you the love and protection of your parents, how easy is the return to their favour, if ye are not wanting to yourselves. Acknowledge but your indiscretions; give but the slightest proofs of your reformation; and they will soon feel all the meltings of pity and love rushing into their hearts: for the cords of parental love are too strong ever to be broken. There is always something within, which will plead for you more forcibly than the strongest language of eloquence: there are ten thousand circumstances, perhaps to an indifferent eye of little moment, which can never be forgotten, which will insure to you a welcome reception, if you can only resolve to make the experiment of returning back to the

duty

duty you have deserted. Even whilst you are yet a great way off, they have compassion on you, and wish most earnestly to fall on your neck and kiss you Deny them not, therefore, by a continuance in your follies, so great and transporting a pleasure; but return back to the protecting arms of your natural guardians and most assured friends, before it be too late. It is yet in your power to give joy and comfort to their declining age: it is yet in your power to gild the evening of their days with light and warmth, and to make them set in peace and pleasure. But should you neglect the present opportunity, you will soon have much to burden your conscience and embitter your future hours: you will bring down their grey hairs with sorrow,—the sharpest of all human sorrow,—to their grave: and when their eyes are closed in death, with what anguish will you reflect on your past undutifulness; with what earnestness will you wish that you could recall them back to earth, to testify your repentance to them, and to wipe away the tear of sorrow from their afflicted cheeks?—And should it be your own lot hereafter to have the honourable name of parent, think, with what anguish must you for ever look down upon your own children: for should they prove disobedient and ungrateful, how must you feel the just punishment of your

own disobedience inflicted by their hands; and should they, on the contrary, prove virtuous and amiable, how must it wound your heart to reflect, that you cruelly deprived your own parents of so unspeakable a satisfaction as you now feel, that of seeing a beloved child grow up in the fear of God, in dutiful obedience to his parents, and in the love and esteem of mankind.

Lastly, Let us all remember, that in the same manner our Father which is in heaven will act to every returning sinner: he will forget their former provocations, and their iniquities he will remember no more: whilst they are yet a great way off, he will draw nigh to them, and prevent them with his grace: he will have compassion on their weakness, and receive them with every mark of fatherly kindness and forgiveness: he will honour them in the sight of men and angels, and call forth all those expressions of joy, which are in heaven over one sinner that repenteth: lastly, his will be the affectionate language of the father in the parable, "it was meet "that we should make merry and be glad; for "this my son was dead, and is alive again; he "was lost, and is found."

SERMON

SERMON XLII.

LUKE viii. 4—7.

When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: And as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it and choaked it.

THE leading characteristics of the stile of the sacred writings are majesty and simplicity: the one suited to the dignity of their divine author and the importance of the subjects contained in them, the other adapted to the temper and understanding of men, of all degrees, for whose advantage and instruction they were written.

These great characteristics are no where more conspicuous, than in those parables, which were made use of by our Saviour, to convey to the assembled multitudes, in a more striking and forcible manner, the weighty and interesting truths of religion. The subject of them is lofty and sublime, becoming the lips of him, who spake as never man spake: but the stile of them is simple and familiar; peculiarly fitted to engage the attention and reach the hearts of those, to whom they were addressed. We cannot, therefore, wonder, that "all the people were very "attentive to hear him," or, as it is expressed in another place, that "the common people "heard him gladly."

The short stories too, on which our Saviour's parables are grounded, are no less engaging, than the style of them is happily pleasing and instructive. Does he wish to represent to us the unavoidable confusion of good and evil men, in the present life, and the different fates which await them hereafter; how naturally does he set before our eyes the iningled tares and corn, the necessity of suffering both to grow together till the harvest, when the wise husbandman will order the one to be gathered into his barn, and the other to be burnt with unquenchable fire! Does he wish to describe to us the miraculous propagation

propagation of the Gospel, in the hands of a few fishermen, and under every possible seeming disadvantage; how fitly does he compare it to a grain of mustard-seed, in appearance small and contemptible, yet soon springing up into a tree, and affording shelter to the birds of the air in its wide and umbrageous branches! Does he wish to impress upon the minds of his hearers, the rashness, and precipitancy of youth, the misery ever consequent upon sin, and the readiness of his divine father to receive returning criminals to his favour; how pathetically does he paint to us an inconsiderate youth, quitting the protection of a kind father, rushing into the snares of ungoverned passions, languishing under the necessary consequences of his vices, and, at length, on his repentance, received back by his indulgent parent with open arms, and every demonstration of sincere joy! Thus also in the words of the text, under the allegory of a sower, scattering his seed on various soils; how admirably does he represent the different effects, which the doctrines of christianity would produce in the world, according to the different temper and disposition of those who heard them!

Should it be thought any objection to what has been now advanced in relation to the perspicuity of the parables used by our Saviour, that he ex-

pressly describes himself as speaking to the Jews in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not perceive; I answer, that this want of perception arose, not from any unfitness in the method of instruction, but from their own indisposition to receive instruction. The Scribes and Pharisees, those hearers whom Christ seems chiefly in this expression to have in view, were in the highest degree prejudiced both against his person and his doctrine, and came to hear him, not with a design of profiting by his divine lessons, but of catching some unguarded expression, on which they might ground an accusation against him. It is not, therefore, surprising, that it should not be given to such perverse and captious hearers to know what was delivered in parables; since they were too much blinded with wickedness to see those which were plain and obvious, and too proud to condescend to be instructed more fully in those, which contained the sublimer mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

With regard to the parable now before us, our divine Master has furnished us with an explanation of its design and tendency, and therefore we are not at liberty to seek for any other. His explanation, however, is full and comprehensive, and will therefore leave us sufficient room to enlarge upon it in our own thoughts and reflections, without

without deviating from its original scope and intention; which is, to justify the christian religion, and to clear it from those objections, which might seem to arise against it, on account of the little effect it had on the minds of those, by whom it was publicly professed.

The seed, says our Saviour, is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; but having no root, believe only for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choaked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

You have here then a compendious view of those causes, which obstructed in the time of our Saviour, and ever will continue, I fear, to obstruct, the natural energy and fruitfulness of God's word.

The seed sown by the way-side, represents those careless and nominal Christians, who hear indeed, but do not consider the weighty truths of religion. Of this sort are all the thoughtless crowds of the busy world, who are born indeed in a christian land, and have been baptized into the name of Christ, but have no other claim to the honourable name of Christians, by which they are, improperly, called. They have indeed the glorious light of the Gospel shining round about them, but their hearts are impervious to its rays. They are never at leisure to entertain any serious thoughts of God and religion. They are too deeply engaged in providing for the present life to have any time to consider what they shall do to inherit eternal life. They are, in fact, just as much unenlightened and unregenerate, as if they had lived in the midst of heathen darkness and idolatry. And accordingly, our Saviour justly represents them in the parable, as being equally with the heathens, under the power and influence of the devil, who cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should be saved.

It is a melancholy thought to consider the greatest part of a christian nation as living in this dangerous and unchristian way: but it is a thought too well established on the basis of truth,

to

to be either doubted or denied. It is no wonder, therefore, that our preaching is vain, when their faith is so vain and void of all foundation. Thousands and ten thousands,—I speak not of those miserable wretches, who are sunk in brutal ignorance and corruption,—I speak of our nobles, our senators, our most distinguished characters in knowledge, in eloquence, in rank and fortune, hardly ever approach the house and altar of God. And if to these we add the many thousands more, who approach them with unfeeling hearts and pre-occupied thoughts, from motives of idleness, custom, or curiosity, we shall not much wonder, that the word of God, though quick and powerful, should produce so little effect in the world. The arguments for the truth of the Gospel are indeed strong and convincing, and the motives to the practice of its duties cogent and irresistible: but these arguments and motives cannot force their way into ears, which refuse to hear them, or into hearts barred against their reception by wilful ignorance and opposition. Let them, however, know, and let every one, who has reason to suspect himself to be in the number of these careless and inconsiderate hearers, know, that it is high time to awake to a right understanding, to a thorough consideration, and a lively sense of that religion, which they now, in name only, profess. Let them be assured,

assured, that the truths of it are too important to be disregarded, and its promises and threatenings too serious to be trifled with: for we cannot neglect, or be unacquainted with, its saving truths, but at the expence of our immortal souls. A second sort of unprofitable hearers are those, who do indeed superficially consider the truths of religion, but not enough to fix them deeply in their minds, or to prevent their falling away in time of temptation: they are, therefore, aptly compared by our Saviour to stony ground, which receives the seed, but wants depth of earth sufficient to bring it to perfection. The guilt of the former sort of unprofitable hearers consisted in their hearing the truths of religion, without considering them; but these, not only consider them, but also receive them with joy; they have a real value for religion, they are convinced of its certainty, they admire its excellency, and rejoice in its privileges. But their unhappiness is, that this good frame and temper of mind is not lasting; in the elegant language of the Prophet, it is like a morning cloud, or as the early dew that passeth away. As long, therefore, as religion turns its bright side towards them they rejoice in its light, and walk in the brightness thereof: but as soon as clouds and storms appear, as soon as dangers, difficulties, and temptations arise, they are then discouraged from their

their holy profession, and, like the young man described in the Gospel, "go away from it sor-"rowful."

The reason of this defection our Saviour declares to be, because they had no root in themselves; their religion was never firmly settled in them; they had never considered it thoroughly and in every point of view; they beheld only its bright side, its privileges, its rewards, its promises and comforts; they never thought of those troubles, discouragements and afflictions, which will sometimes fall to the lot of the best men, and, therefore, were unable to bear their rude shocks; they forgot that the Captain of their salvation was made perfect through sufferings, and that the servant had no right to expect better treatment than his master: having not, therefore, sufficient depth of earth to support and nourish them, when assaulted by the rough blasts of trial, and the chilling rigours of adversity, they soon withered away, because they lacked moisture.

To the same unhappy cause we may justly ascribe that fluctuation and variety of opinions, both in sacred and prophane matters, which are at once so much the characteristics and disgrace of the present age. Men of warm tempers and shallow

shallow judgments, who, like the stony soil, have heat without depth of earth, are easily carried about with every wind of doctrine, and the cunning craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. Hence our religious creed, which should be as fixed and immutable as the God who is the object of it, is as various and mutable as our political one, whilst one is of Paul, another of Cephas, and another of Apollos. For so long as men are not firmly rooted and grounded in the truth, they will naturally be ready to catch at every phantom of novelty, and to follow every theological teacher, who has impudence enough to boast, like other empirics, that he alone possesses the arcanum of salvation.

The last sort of unprofitable hearers described by our Saviour are those, in whom the truths of religion are stifled and suppressed by the cares, and riches, and pleasures of life; by the unlawful desires of our hearts after things forbidden and sinful, or, by our immoderate pursuit even of what is in itself lawful and innocent. It is one great proof of the depravation of our nature, and of its being fallen from its first excellency, that it is ever ready to prefer the gross and baser pleasures of the senses, to those more noble and sublime contemplations, which may be drawn from a right cultivation of the mental powers.

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Man seems to have partaken of that curse, which was inflicted on the earth for his sake, that it should bring forth thorns and thistles, what is noxious and disgraceful, instead of what is profitable and honourable. Hence his mind is ever pre-occupied by a train of groveling passions, which either prevent the admittance of religious truth, or stifle it in its growth: for a love of God and a love of the world can never flourish in the same soil. And the more men immerse themselves in the cares of the world, the deeper they drink of the circean cup of pleasure, the more insensible they will become to all the motives of religion, and the powers of the world to come; till, at length, time and habit have brought them into a deadly stupefaction, from which nothing can wake them but the terrors of death, or the trumpet of the arch-angel, and the prospect of the throne of judgment.

Since then the cares and pleasures of the world will infallibly choke the word and make it unfruitful, and since that unfruitfulness will as infallibly bring on eternal death, it is certainly our interest to pay less regard to the world and more to our souls; remembering that the whole world itself would be but an ill exchange for our souls. We need not, however, as some have done, carry our contempt of the business or pleasures of life

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so far, as either gloomily to retire from them to deserts and solitudes, or to think that they can have no relish with virtuous and pious men. Such sour and rigid notions carry with them an appearance of superior holiness, and a more exalted strain of christian perfection; and, therefore, sometimes serve to cover the designs of artful men, and at all times to captivate the minds of the credulous and ignorant: but I will be bold to say, that as on the one hand they discourage men from the service of God, which is the most perfect freedom, so on the other, they have no foundation either in the letter or in the spirit of Christianity, when rightly understood; which, even in its severest precepts, addressed to Christians under persecution and torments, no where forbids the use, though it wisely regulates and restrains the abuse of innocent pleasures. And as little foundation have such splenetic notions in the great law of sense and reason. For surely the God that made the world, never spent so much time and care in forming and adorning it, and in furnishing it with every thing necessary for use and pleasure, that they who were made by him to inhabit it, should either contumaciously despise or sullenly reject his proffered bounties. Nor, again, did God ever intend, that ambition, emulation, and appetite, should ever be wanting in the best of men, so

long as the world lasts; which, under due regulations, are not only laudable but absolutely necessary for the movement of the great machine of the universe. It will be enough for us so to love the world as not to prefer it to Him who is the maker of it, and so to regulate our affections and passions, in the persuit whether of business or pleasure, as ever to keep them in a due subordination to reason, and in subserviency to the great end of our coming into the world, that is, of obeying the will of God in all things, and thereby promoting our own eternal happiness.

Let us then so endeavour to live in the world, that whilst we are discharging our duties in it with a becoming chearfulness, neither its cares nor pleasures may take off our thoughts from the contemplation of Him, in whom we live and move, or stifle those devout and pious resolutions of obedience to his will, which such an employment of our thoughts will naturally suggest to us. And whenever we hear the word of God, let it be with such attention and reverence, with such a freedom from incogitancy or distracting cares, that its doctrines may sink deep into our hearts, and that we may be found in the number of those, who in an honest and good heart having heard

heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

But, if, with the infidel, we reject the word spoke; or if, with the nominal Christian, we hear it with listless indifference; or if, with the speculative Christian, we receive it with joy, but come not under the vital energy and influence of it; or lastly, if with the worldly Christian, we suffer it to be choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures; we have much to fear from the just judgments of God, who has vouchsafed to us peculiar advantages over all the nations of the world, with respect to the knowledge of his will: a church, I will not say, infallible, or free from all corruptions; but I will say, in the words of a wise and noble writer *, more free from dangerous corruptions, than any other that professes a faith in Christ: a ministry, in the confession of its enemies, not unlearned, or unable to feed the flock of Christ with wholesome doctrine; and, what is above all, a free and unfettered access to the sacred volumes of truth, with an unrestrained liberty of exercising that reason and judgment, which are the birth-right and honour of every reasonable creature. Should these seem to any inconsiderable advantages,

* See Lord Clarendon's Letter to his Children.

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let them for a moment compare their own situation with that bondage of corruption, under which the greatest part of the known world still groans, either from papal superstition or pagan ignorance; nay, let them only look back to the dismal state of their forefathers in this kingdom, not many centuries ago, and they will soon see just cause to bless the kind providence of God, that their lot is fallen on so fair a ground.

Whether our improvements in virtue keep pace with these advantages, and whether the purity of our lives corresponds with the purity of our faith, you all know, and it is no pleasure to me to repeat. But surely it is a shocking disgrace to us to say, and yet truth requires me to say, that, wherever our fleets or armies have carried their conquests or their discoveries, they have carried corruption and oppression at the same time, have committed crimes unknown to untutored savages, and have left the innocent natives of every clime on the globe to curse the pollution, which we falsely call the polish, of European manners. May the great God of heaven touch our hearts with a better sense of his blessings; may we all so clearly see the error of our ways and amend

them; that the uplifted bolts of divine vengeance may be suspended, and that we may never experience those heavy calamities, which still continue to overwhelm a people, once favoured like ourselves, for their infidelity and unfruitfulness in the word of God spoken to them!

SER-

SERMON XLII.

1 Tim. iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

THE more we survey the actions of man, considered as a moral being, the more shall we have occasion to be surprized at a creature so strange and inconsistent in all his ways. Fickle and inconstant; wise, yet foolish; proud, yet mean and groveling; in understanding an angel, in practice a brute; his whole life is one continued riddle to himself and all around him. And in nothing is this inconsistency more evident and remarkable, than in what relates to his religious conduct and behaviour. Convinced as he must be, that there is a God who ruleth over all; he yet every day lives as without God in the world. He feels within him a pure and exalted soul,

created for honour and immortality; and yet he scruples not every moment to defile that soul by the indulgence of his lusts, to debase it by drunkenness and intemperance, to destroy it by repeated acts of sin and sensuality. He sees the goodness of the Almighty in the hourly preservation of his life, and in every blessing he enjoys; he owns the dreadful hand of the same Almighty in every misery that he fears, and in every calamity that he suffers; and yet, regardless of both, he dares to provoke and affront him, by profaning his sabbaths, by taking his sacred name in vain, and in short, by deliberately breaking every single commandment he hath given. He acknowledges the stupendous love of that God, who came down from the throne of heaven to save him; yet will not bestow one moment's labour to save himself. He hears, he pities, he bewails the sufferings of that Saviour, who died for him on the cross at Jerusalem; yet hesitates not by his daily transgressions to crucify him afresh, and to put him to a perpetual shame. He is sensible that eternal misery is the wages of sin; and yet he daily and deliberately committeth sin. He knows, that eternal happiness is the reward of virtue; and yet he constantly breaks through every law and rule of virtue. He is assured, that the present life is short and uncertain, but that the next is certain and eternal

eternal; and yet, chained down, as it were, to the earth he treads upon, he never raises his eyes to the regions of immortality, but with never-ceasing care and trouble, laboureth for the meat that perisheth, and those earthly treasures which moth and rust corrupt. He calls himself a Christian, he sees and admires the pure precepts of his religion, he confesses the excellence of its doctrines, he adores the benevolent character and deportment of its divine author and its first professors and martyrs; but he seldom attempts to reach the perfection of those doctrines in his life, or to copy their bright examples in his conversation. He acknowledges the use and necessity of repentance, yet seldom thinks of breaking off his sins by repentance, till age or sickness, or calamity, alarm his conscience, and place the terrors of hell before his eyes.

Such and so foolish is the conduct of much the greater part of mankind! Nor need we seek far for the cause of this conduct, strange and unaccountable as it may, perhaps, at first sight, seem. For it is but too clear, that men entertain strong and almost invincible prejudices against the practice of religion. They look upon it as a gloomy and melancholy task imposed upon them by a hard master, utterly inconsistent with present pleasure, and an enemy to those joys of

life, in which they have placed their happiness. Convinced, therefore, as they are of the truth of its doctrines, they are very unwilling to enter upon the practice of them. They wish to enjoy their favourite sins and pleasures a little and a little longer, and thus to secure the happiness of the present life, as well as of that which is to come. This foolish prejudice of mankind against religion, the Apostle very clearly foresaw, and therefore, in the words of my text, guards his christian converts against the danger of being misled by it. He tells them that godliness is so far from being hurtful to the present interests and enjoyments of life, "that it is profitable "for all things:" that whilst earthly treasures cannot even secure the happiness of the present moment, this heavenly one is able both to shower down blessings upon them here, and also to ensure to them eternal glory hereafter; "having," as he finely expresses it, "a promise "of the life that now is, and also of that which "is to come."

And indeed, if we impartially weigh the matter, we shall find there is very just ground for giving our assent to this assertion of the Apostle; we shall find that there can be no real happiness, no true gladness of heart, which does not flow from a fear of God and the practice of his commandments.

mandments. For what, alas! are all the pleasures of sin, when weighed in the scale of just and impartial reason! How empty, how trifling and unsatisfactory do they appear to a sober and considerate mind! How unsuitable to the great purposes for which we were all of us sent into the world! How unworthy of a creature born to an immortal inheritance, a candidate for a crown of never-fading glory!—Look around the busy world, and behold those unhappy mortals who are ever spending their lives in the restless persuit of earthly pleasures, and see what are the enjoyments which they reap from them. After all their toil and labour, we no sooner see them in possession of what they so earnestly desired, but a little time makes that disrelished, and some new shadow of pleasure attracts their notice, and engrosses their whole attention. And thus, after they have run through the whole circle of human delights, they are left to bemoan their folly, and remain more dissatisfied with their condition, than when they first set out. Hence it is, that few of those, who are engaged in the persuit of the pleasures of the world, would chuse to live over again their past lives, or even to repeat the actions of the former day, were it in their power; so little do those pleasures bear a repetition, and so trifling is all the satisfaction that attends them! Hence also arises that want of thought

and agreeable reflection so often seen amongst those who have spent their days in pleasure, regardless of God and his service. Hence it is, that we find such men always complaining, how much the times are altered for the worse, when the gaiety of youth, which painted every thing in an agreeable light, is over, and old age or infirmity has cut them off from their wonted pleasures, or the grave has robbed them of the companions of their folly and intemperance. What words can paint the situation of a sinner thus left a prey to gloomy reflections and disease, without one thought to comfort or alleviate his anguish of soul. And yet such is the situation to which every man will one day come, who places his happiness in the good things of this life only.

And now let us turn our eyes from this melancholy scene, to the good and virtuous man, who has endeavoured to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and also towards man. How different a prospect here presents itself to our view! He has been laying out that time in worthy actions, which others waste in a circle of sin and folly, and therefore is conscious of having truly acted up to the dignity of nature, and the wise designs of the God of nature: and from that consciousness arises a pleasing satisfaction,

faction, which fills his mind with joy unspeakable and much superior to all the gratifications of earthly enjoyments. Such a man can with a chearful satisfaction from the past, and a joyful expectation from the future, travel on through every stage of life with solid comfort, and in every trial rise superior to all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If he looks back upon his life, he will find every period of it distinguished by some kind, worthy and benevolent action. He will find his youthful days to have been spent in the chearful joys of innocence, and his riper years to have been employed in that work of righteousness which is peace, and the effect of which is quietness and assurance for ever. And if he looks forward to that awful time, when age and infirmities shall seize him, even in this last stage of affliction, common alike to the greatest and the least of mankind, he finds nothing to discompose or oppress him; but, on the contrary, a full assurance of peace and inward comfort. That charity, which before induced him to relieve the sorrows of others, will now, by the providence of God, return into his own bosom, and in reflection ease and alleviate his own. That benevolence which formerly caused the widow's heart to sing for joy, will now soften the cares of age, and alleviate the burden of infirmity. And that piety, which has been

been his support through life, will not fail to strengthen him in the agonies of nature and the painful hour of death.

Such then, upon a general view, are the different situations of the righteous and the wicked; such their respective claims to the happiness of the present life! But I mean not to stop here; I will carry my enquiry still farther, and endeavour to show, that in every situation, both in prosperity and adversity, godliness is the greatest gain, and the good man has the fairest title to those blessings upon which the happiness of life depends.

And first, in comparing together the situation of the righteous and the wicked, with regard to the enjoyment of the blessings of prosperity, I will begin with health, the great cordial of life, and foundation of every other blessing: And here, should I ask, who has the greatest probability of enjoying this inestimable blessing, the man who moderates his appetites, who keeps his passions in subjection to his reason, and is never ruffled by the violence of rage or resentment; or he, who is a slave to lust and intemperance; I believe no one here present would be at a loss what answer to return. For look round the world, and examine the common effects of a sinful

sinful life upon the body: whence proceed the shaking hand and rheumy eye, the haggard look, the tottering limbs and premature old age, with all their ghastly train of evils and misfortunes, which too often descend even to a man's innocent posterity? Come they not from drunkenness and intemperance, from the circle of folly, from enervating pleasures and irregular hours, those slow but never-failing destroyers of the strongest constitution? This the wise king of Israel long ago observed and declared to the sons of men in these expressive words: "who "hath sorrow, who hath contentions, who hath "babbling, who hath wounds without cause, "who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry "long at the wine, they that go to seek mixt "wine." So that he had just reason for giving his son this important lesson of advice; "my "son, forget not my law, but let thine heart "keep my commandments: for length of days "and long life shall they add unto thee."

Nor, secondly, hath the righteous man less advantage over the wicked with regard to the acquisition of riches and the enjoyment of a good reputation. For though the wicked may sometimes prosper and have riches in possession; and though the righteous may, for wise reasons, be afflicted with poverty and disgrace; yet surely no

no one can doubt, but that integrity of heart and uprightness of dealing are in general the surest means of advancing a man's fortune and reputation in the world. For, though fraud, injustice, and rotten hypocrisy may succeed long, they will not always; men are naturally led by their own interests to find out and detect them; and where they are once detected, to expose and abhor them: so that there is not a truer maxim in the world than that old, though too often neglected proverb, "that honesty is the best "policy." And indeed there cannot be a stronger testimony than that which the heaven-inspired Psalmist bears to this point in various places; "what man is he that feareth the Lord: his soul "shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit "the earth. O fear the Lord; for there is no "want to them that fear him: the young lions "do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek "the Lord shall not want any good thing. Evil "doers shall be cut off; but those that wait "upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." Nay, the same royal Psalmist even tells us, that this blessing of God upon the labours of the righteous shall extend to his latest posterity: "I have been young," says he, "and now am "old," that is, I have long had opportunities of observing God's dealings with mankind, and I am now able to declare from my own knowledge,

ledge, "that I never saw the righteous forsaken, "nor his seed begging their bread."

But how different and how terrible a fate does another inspired writer pronounce upon the wicked and his posterity; which he introduces with this solemn preface! "I will teach you by "the hand of God; that which is with the "Almighty will I not conceal. This is the "portion of a wicked man with God, and the "heritage of oppressors, which they shall re- "ceive of the Almighty: If his children be "multiplied, it is for the sword; and his off- "spring shall not be satisfied with bread: those "that remain of him shall be buried in death, "and his widows shall not weep: Though he "heap up silver as the dust, and prepare rai- "ment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the "just shall put it on, and the innocent shall "divide the silver: his strength shall be hunger- "bitten, and destruction shall be ready at his "side: it shall devour the strength of his skin; "even the first-born of death shall devour his "strength: his remembrance shall perish from "the earth, and he shall have no name in the "streets: he shall neither have son nor nephew "among his people, nor any remaining in his "dwellings: they that come after him shall be "astonished at his day, as they that went before "were

" were affrighted: surely such are the dwellings
" of the wicked, and this is the place of him
" that feareth not God."

Thus we see then, that in prosperity the righteous man hath every advantage over the wicked, which health and reputation, which the enjoyment of present fortune and the hope of leaving behind him a flourishing and happy posterity, can possibly give. And if we shift the scene, and compare together the righteous and the wicked in the day of adversity, we shall find the superiority of the righteous still more noble and apparent. If, in this vale of tears, misfortunes surround him, he knows that afflictions spring not from the dust, but are directed by the hands of an almighty Father, for the wise and gracious purposes of correction, or for a trial of his faith and constancy; and therefore patiently and chearfully bears them. If sickness invades him, he has no guilty fears and apprehensions, to increase his torments and double his pain, and therefore submissively waits to glorify God, whether it be by life or by death. And when that last and awful moment approaches, which shall draw the curtain of mortality from before his eyes, armed with the shield of faith, and having on the breast plate of righteousness, he can safely bid defiance

to

to all the fiery darts of the wicked; he can meet the King of terrors without dismay, and with a noble confidence look forwards to that crown of glory, which is prepared for the faithful soldiers of Christ.

But now, view the wicked man in the same circumstances of distress. If calamities or sickness befall him, and every man will some time or other have his share of them, in what can he place his comfort or dependence? Will he fly for help to his possessions, or trust in the multitude of his riches? Alas! all his possessions are unable to stop the unerring arrows of the Almighty, neither can his riches profit in the day of wrath. "Will God hear his cry," says holy Job, "when trouble cometh upon him? "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? "Will he always call upon God?" Alas! for what has he a right to call upon God, unless it be for vengeance upon his unrepented sins, and for his having so long and often slighted the mercies offered to him? Will he place his hopes in death, as the last refuge from misfortune, and a deliverance from trouble? Alas! to the righteous death may be a welcome friend and guide, appointed by the Almighty to conduct them to the promised land of eternal happiness, but to him he must be the dreadful and alarming king

king of terrors. The scripture tells us, "the "righteous hath hope in his death;" but the wicked can have nothing but dismay and amazement of heart. For the prospect of eternity, which to the righteous is the fountain of joy and immortality, to him is the beginning of sorrows, and the blackness of darkness for evermore.

Thus different is the situation of the righteous and the wicked in every circumstance of life and death; thus profitable is godliness for all things; having, as we see, the promise both of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come!

And now, my brethren, having thus explained to you the words of the Apostle, it only remains for me to intreat you to consider what has been said with that seriousness which the importance of the subject demands: to consider it, not as intended to please the fancy or amuse the ear, but to reform and correct the heart: not as the customary professional harangue of the preacher, but as the pure and unchangeable word of God: for his ambassadors and ministers we are, and in his name it is that we intreat you.

Nor

Nor is it any trifling or common errand upon which I now bespeak your attention. For as, on the one hand, it is not the riches of the world, the pleasures of a moment, or an earthly inheritance, which I have to offer; but it is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled in the heavens; it is a kingdom that fadeth not away, and those pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore: so, on the other hand, it is not a momentary pain, the torment of an hour, anguish of body or temporal death, which I have to denounce against the sinner; but it is a death eternal, it is a torment of the soul, it is the worm that never dieth, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

And now then, life and death are before ye; chuse ye which ye will. But do not vainly imagine, that this choice will always be in your power. The gate of mercy is now indeed open; God now invites you by his ministers, by his word, by the checks of conscience and the silent impulses of his holy spirit: but how long ye will enjoy these advantages, is known only to him from whom no secrets are hid. Yet surely ye have all of you seen enough of human life, to know by how precarious a bond you hold them. Or if ye are still ignorant of this, look back to the generations of old, and learn of

them. Ye who have ever lost the friend of your bosom, or have been witnesses to the expiring groan of the child ye loved, go to their silent tombs, and from them learn wisdom: like you, they probably rejoiced in the strength of youth, and vainly imagined they had many years to work out their salvation. Like you, they trode the flowery paths of pleasure, or were immersed in the busy persuits of life, regardless of the God who gave them life. Like you, they deferred the work of repentance from day to day; like you they hoped, that the forbearance of God would always prolong their time of grace. But ah! their mouldering ashes now too plainly declare, how vain and fruitless were all their expectations.

And which of us can pretend to say, that we are more certain of life than they were? However vainly we may trust in them, it is not strength, youth, or beauty which can save us from death: the undistinguishing grave receives alike the bloom of infancy and the tottering steps of decrepid age. Nay, in the very midst of life itself we are in death: the very breath that we are now drawing is carrying away a part of our being, and bringing us nearer to the confines of the grave, and the hour of judgment.

The

The hour of judgment! Oh! horrible sound to those who are unprepared for its coming! Oh words of terrible import, which contain in them all the miseries which guilt can fear or human nature suffer! an exclusion from heaven, a separation from God, and ages of eternity spent in utter darkness, amidst unutterable torments.

And what then, my brethren, can hide these things from your eyes? What charm is it that hinders you from seeing your eternal welfare and being wise unto salvation? Had ye all the enjoyments the world can afford, nay, had ye the world itself in possession, with all its empires and kingdoms, yet, when compared with the kingdom of heaven, it would appear but as the dust of the balance; and therefore it would be madness to hesitate which ye should chuse. And is it not then the height of madness to prefer the painful enjoyments of sin, when ye have a religion offered to you, which cannot only insure that heavenly kingdom, but also the only true happiness which the present state of trial affords; a religion which has not only the promises of the life to come, but also of that which now is.

Come then, Religion, daughter of heaven, parent of happiness, possess our hearts with thy

divine influence, and make us all thy own! Too long, misguided by youth, misled by ambition, or corrupted by example, we have neglected the fear of God, we have trodden the steps of folly, we have listened to the voice of sin. But now, convinced of our danger, we fly to thee for succour, we fall as prostrate suppliants at thy altar. Teach, oh teach us, therefore, to despise the vanities of the world, to look down with pity on the slaves of ambition, to abhor the maxims of sin, to fly the wiles of temptation, and to place our happiness on objects beyond the power of fortune, beyond the reach of chance.

And thou, eternal Providence, who dost make the heavens revolve and the insect crawl, who art watchful even over the least and lowest of thy works; oh! lend thy friendly hand to snatch us from the paths of darkness and the shadow of death! Do thou deign to receive from us that homage and submission which thou alone canst render worthy to be offered to thee! Do thou teach us to revere those virtues which thou hast condescended to instruct us in, and inspire our breasts with thy heavenly graces of innocence, peace, and contentment!

Thus

Thus guided by thy spirit, instructed by thy precepts, supported by thy comforts, we shall securely conduct our trembling steps through the paths of life: thus shall we joyfully resign this anxious being at the hour of death, in full confidence of receiving from thy hands the immortal crown of patience and virtue, which thou hast prepared for them that love and fear thee.

SERMON XLIII.

1 Cor. i. 23.

We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

WE need not to be informed that, even at the first appearance of Christianity in the world, there were not wanting wicked and audacious infidels, who branded it with the opprobrious names of weakness and foolishness. And, that this unhappy race of men is not yet extinct in the world, our own experience in private and the many daring attacks which are publicly made both upon the divinity of Christ and the doctrines of his Gospel, but too plainly declare to every man, who has a just regard for the interests of religion. What then can be the

foundation of so heavy a charge against a religion, which seems to carry with it marks of the strongest benevolence, and to recommend itself to the approbation of all men, by a system of the purest and most enlightened doctrines? Doctrines, which tend to rescue us from all uncertainty and error here, and open to us the most cheering prospects of a state of future happiness; which, therefore, it is certainly every man's interest to wish at least to be true: For if the doctrines of Christianity be not true, what is there within the compass of either ancient or modern learning, sufficient either to heal the wounds of present suffering, or ward off the stings of future apprehension? What then can balance the weight of these great considerations, or induce men to reject a religion so truly desirable, and essential to human happiness?

Why truly, the Jew of old wished to have the law of Moses perpetual: but the Gospel declared it to be a dead letter, and of none effect: He expected a glorious and triumphant Messias: but the Gospel declared him to be of humble birth, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Again;

Again: The modern infidel thinks, that nothing should be imposed upon him, as an article of faith, which he cannot perfectly comprehend; and that nothing should be required of him in point of practice, but what arises from the impulse of nature: but the Gospel not only demands his belief of many things above the narrow limits of his capacity, but, what is still worse, exacts from him the performance of several duties, which are opposite to the bias of inclination, and seem to bear hard upon human nature itself.

This is the true state of the grounds of that antient and modern infidelity, by which the doctrine of the cross is branded as foolishness. Let us, therefore, try if we cannot remove these vain prejudices of foolish men, by shewing that the plan of the Gospel dispensation is in these several articles perfectly agreeable to the rules of true wisdom, and equally suitable to the honour of God, and advantage of man.

And 1st, With regard to the abrogation of the ceremonial part of the Mosaic law, we may justly observe, that it was from the first of a temporary nature, and plainly intended to give way to a fuller and more extensive display of the divine will, to which it bore, in all its parts, a clear

clear and distinct relation. In early times, indeed, it was of great use to mankind, that the purity of truth did not every where and entirely lose its lustre, but remained in one small corner of the earth, where it was suffered to take root and fill the land. But it was surely neither agreeable to the goodness nor intention of God, that it should remain shut up and confined there for ever. Nor indeed would the Jews themselves allow it to do so: For even they had so blended error with truth, superstition with religion, and vice with virtue, that a farther discovery of the will of God was become as necessary to them, as to the rest of the world. God, therefore, in mercy, sent his Son into the world to dispel the dark mists of ignorance, and to fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, even as the waters cover the sea. What reason then had the Jew to complain, that the Gospel exchanged the shadow for the substance, removed a dim light to substitute a brighter in its room, abolished the Mosaic law to introduce a law more perfect, more intelligible, and founded on better promises; and which was, in fact, the long-predicted end and completion of the Jewish dispensation itself? Or, why should he repine, that God who is the common parent of Jew and Gentile, and is willing that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth and

be

be saved, should promote his own glory and their happiness, by extending the means of salvation to all nations, and by making his name known from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same?

A second cause, why the Jews thought the preaching of the cross foolishness, was the obscure birth, the mean and afflicted life, the painful and ignominious death of the blessed Jesus. Mistaking the nature of Christ's kingdom, and misinterpreting the ancient prophecies which related to it, they foolishly expected a conqueror surrounded with all the pomp of regal splendor, who should sit on the throne of David his father; a deliverer, who should liberate them, not from the bondage of sin and death, but from the tyranny of the Roman yoke, under which they had long groaned.

Our Jesus, we readily acknowledge, answers not to these high characters of earthly greatness and temporal power. He was, on the contrary, both in life and death, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; he was despised and rejected of men, stricken for the transgression of the people, bruised and wounded in the day of the Lord's fierce anger. But, at the same time, we know, that these afflictions were expressly foretold

foretold by the antient prophets, and that the whole tenor of the Old Testament, both in its types and predictions, represents the Messias as the lamb, which was to be slain for the sins of the world. We know too, that the kingdom he was to establish, was a kingdom of righteousness; that the victories he was to gain were victories over the powers of darkness; that his triumphs were to be over the grave and death; triumphs far more glorious than if he had come, as the Jews expected, riding on Cherubim and Seraphim, or, like the great Jehovah himself, flying on the wings of the wind.

Besides; the greatness of our Saviour's sufferings were so far from derogating from his dignity, as the Jews pretend, that they serve to give us a more exalted idea of his divine temper and character. The heathen philosophers, as well as the Gospel, tell us, that man must be made perfect through sufferings, and that no sight is so well deserving the admiration of a God, as a virtuous man struggling with afflictions, and refusing to yield to them. As much, therefore, as our Redeemer's sorrow was above any sorrow, and his patience superior to every other patience, by so much was he the more deserving of our admiration and esteem. Nay, we may carry the argument still farther: his mean

mean appearance and sufferings even add to the evidence of his divine mission, by making his miracles appear still more astonishing, when we behold this man of sorrows, this despised and rejected Galilean, commanding all nature by a single word, and exerting the powers of omnipotence, by recalling the dead to life. The Jews indeed fancied, when they saw him expiring on the cross, that he was in reality the carpenter's son, whom they had so often mocked and derided. But when we see the graves pouring forth their dead, and nature in convulsions at the death of this despised sufferer; nay, what is more, when we see death itself swallowed up in victory by his resurrection; we cannot but be convinced, as well as astonished, by wonders so unsuitable to the outward appearance of their author; we cannot stand out against such plain credentials of heaven; credentials, as incapable of being counterfeited, as they are of ever being paralleled.

Let us consider, again, our Saviour's obscure appearance and sufferings in another light. The professed design of his coming into the world was to teach men the hard lessons of mortification and self-denial, of humility and meekness, of contentedness and peace, of charity and forgiveness, of patience under afflictions, and resignation

nation to the will of God. Now how unsuitable to the inculcating such lessons as these, would such a triumphant conqueror have been, as the Jews expected; a conqueror surrounded with all the luxuries of royal affluence, and whose hands were stained with the blood of slaughtered enemies. But, when we see the teacher of these doctrines called out to the practice of them; when we see him poor and afflicted, yet patient and submissive; tempted, yet firm and unshaken; reviled, yet reviling not again; persecuted to death, yet praying for his murderers; how nobly does example add energy to precept! what encouragement have his followers to suffer patiently, when they see the Captain of their salvation thus eminently made perfect through sufferings!

But, 3dly, The modern infidel brands the Gospel with the name of foolishness, for requiring him to believe what he cannot perfectly comprehend. But where is the pretended unreasonableness of requiring this? Is it any dishonour to the creature to give credit to the testimony of his Creator in these points? Is it any hardship to submit his own understanding to the depths of infinite wisdom? Or if he proudly refuses to do so, what is this, but, like the presumptuous giants of heathen mythology,

to pile mountain upon mountain, and attempt to scale even heaven itself? We will own that there are mysteries in religion, which surpass our comprehension:—the plurality of persons in the unity of the Godhead, the manifestation of God in the flesh, the operations of the Holy Spirit, the restitution of the scattered particles of our bodies to their ancient functions, we understand not, we pretend not to understand, much less, as some have injudiciously done, to explain and define. Yet, where is the hardship or unreasonableness of believing them on the authority of God, the revealer, though we know not the mode or quality of the things revealed? Or, where would be the merit of believing them if they were presented for our acceptance with all the clearness of intuitive knowledge or irresistible demonstration?

But farther: Where is the justice of objecting to mysteries in religion alone? Every thing within and around us is mystery. The revolution of the planets, the transmission of light, the production of animals, the vegetation of plants, the gravitation and cohesion of matter, the vital union of soul and body, with their mode of acting upon each other; these are all mysteries, which the proudest understanding will not pretend to fathom, and yet must be forced

forced to acknowledge, as having a real existence and use for all the purposes of life. If then in things natural we cannot attain to demonstrative certainty, but are forced to acknowledge and act upon principles, which we cannot comprehend, how unreasonable is it to expect that we should perfectly comprehend all things spiritual; and when the whole material creation is one continued mystery, to wonder that God himself, the Creator, should be unsearchable in his moral dispensations, and his providential ways past finding out; to teach man that important lesson—to wonder and adore!

But, 4thly, The infidel brands the Gospel with the name of foolishness, because it exacts from him the performance of several duties, which are opposite to the bias of inclination, and seem to bear hard upon human nature.

This is the true basis of all infidelity, whatever other causes men may pretend to assign for their unbelief.—"The christian doctrine does not "comply with the ambitious man's desire of "honour, nor the miser's hunting after wealth, "nor with the voluptuous and debauched in "their pleasures and vicious enjoyments; but "crosses all such appetites, by enjoining humility, contentedness, contempt of the world, "sobriety,

"sobriety, chastity, and temperance*." Hence the tears and clamours of infidelity: hence the general cry of unbelievers, that the preaching of the cross is foolishness. Unwilling to quit their lusts, they affect to despise the religion which condemns them: unable to wean their groveling affections from things below, they would be thought to disbelieve the doctrines of the Gospel, which tend to raise them to things above: in one word, they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

But after all, what are these heavy restraints, which the infidel complains of, as a sore burden too heavy for him to bear? Would the infidel then have no rule of conduct in life? Would he have all the fences of decorum broken down, and the exuberance of human lusts let loose upon the common of nature, unfettered and unrestrained? Or, again, was there ever a religion in the world; nay, was there ever a system of human law or civil policy, which did not lay some restraint upon the gross and brutal inclinations of human nature? Or can it be thought any hardship to practise the duties of temperance, chastity, sobriety, and patience; of justice, equity, charity, and truth, which are

* Collyer's Sacred Interpreter.

clearly taught by reason as well as religion, and which every considerate heathen saw to be apparently conducive to the happiness of individuals, as well as of public societies? And if to these the Christian Legislator has superadded some sublimer sentiments of morality, they are such as no less clearly approve themselves to every candid mind. To bear injuries patiently,—to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven,—to extend our kindness to all men, in imitation of the great Parent of nature, who sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust,—to deal with others, as we should reasonably wish to be dealt with ourselves in the same circumstances,—to govern our vicious thoughts and inclinations, as well as to abstain from vicious acts,—to raise our souls from present gratifications to the contemplation of sublimer, though distant enjoyments; these are improvements in morality, which indeed carry the christian system far beyond any other the world ever saw, but which, at the same time, most clearly tend to promote the dignity and happiness of man, and therefore cannot justly be rejected by any one, who wishes to act consistently with the dictates of reason, who is not guided by blind lusts and brutal passions.

Thus we see, then, the foolishness of God, when rightly weighed, is wiser than men. The Apostle,

Apostle, in my text, farther adds, "and the "weakness of God is stronger than men."

The truth of this I might shew in a variety of instances. But, unwilling to trespass too long upon your time and patience, I shall confine myself to that single one, which the Apostle St. Paul seems to have had principally in view,—the miraculous propagation of the Gospel of Christ. Whoever well considers the circumstances under which the religion we profess made its first appearance in the world, may justly call it the weakness of God. It springs up in an obscure corner of the world; in a nation, once the peculiar care of Providence, but then despised, and groaning under the heavy yoke of Roman usurpation: its doctrines are severe, and contrary to the corruptions of the world: its religious rites are opposite to the impure or depraved worship both of Gentile and Jewish superstition: the natural corruption of the human heart, the interested prejudice of bigotry, and the strength of civil power, are united together, in one confederate band, to oppose its progress. And who, then, are the men, who are to counteract this formidable alliance, and to introduce the doctrines of Christianity into the world, in spite of all these disadvantages?—An obscure Galilean is its first publisher: illiterate fishermen

and mechanics are its propagators:—men void of every natural and acquired advantage; without birth, without art, without learning, without eloquence, without connections, without power, without wealth; nay, even compelled to earn the very bread they eat by the daily sweat of their brows. Could there be circumstances more unfavourable? Could there be a contest more unequal? Could there be a greater appearance of weakness and imbecility? Yet, see! how much the weakness of God is stronger than men! Under all these disadvantages, the Gospel of Christ makes its way in the world with incredible rapidity, and flies, like the winged lightning, from east to west. Jews and proselytes, strangers of Rome, Cretes and Arabians, all acknowledge the wonderful work of God. The corruption of man is convicted, the pride of reason is humbled, the prejudice of bigotry is conquered, the strength of civil power is broken. Can there be a greater instance of a divine interposition? Can there be a fuller proof, that the weakness of God is stronger than men? Well might, therefore, the Apostle say in the emphatic words following my text, "God hath chosen the foolish things of "the world to confound the wise; and God "hath chosen the weak things of the world "to confound the mighty; and base things of "the world, and things which are despised, hath

"God chosen; yea, and things which are not,
"to bring to nought things which are; that no
"flesh should glory in his presence."

Remember, therefore, my brethren, that as often as you profess your belief in the Gospel of Christ, you are acknowledging a system, which hath God for its author, and is supported by the most cogent arguments:—a system founded on the most perfect rules of wisdom; which provides equally for the honour of God your Maker and the happiness of yourselves; which requires you to believe nothing, which is not perfectly agreeable to right reason, and which lays no restraints upon you, which a wise man would not wish to lay upon himself:—a system, not founded upon prospects of interest, not inculcated by force or terror of arms, not insinuated by enticing words of man's wisdom: which hath maintained its ground, under every seeming disadvantage, against all its enemies, and, we trust, under God, will still continue to do so, till time shall be no more.

Those who are learned in Christ, I need not exhort to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering. They well know in whom they have believed, and want not my feeble and imperfect aid to strengthen and support the grounds

grounds of their belief. But the weak and unlearned brethren in Christ, who have neither the means nor the abilities to inquire for themselves, will suffer me to exhort them not to fall from their stedfastness, or to be shaken, by any licentious opposition against Christianity. The cause of such licentiousness, striking at the very fundamentals of religion, in a country, where in reason one would least expect to find it, I take not upon me to assign: be it on the consciences of those who assume it to themselves, or who do not their part to restrain and suppress it. But the effects of it every sincere Christian will join with me in deploring, which tend to weaken the bonds of society, to introduce an inundation of wickedness, and to cut off the only reasonable hope man can entertain, that of a future state of existence and happiness.

It is not, however, from the strength of their arguments, or the weakness of our cause, that danger is to be apprehended. Christianity has stood more dangerous attacks, and has encountered more formidable opponents, than a Rousseau, a Voltaire, or a Gibbon, whom ignorant and superficial reasoners are apt to consider as the unanswerable champions of infidelity, though, in fact, they are only the retailers of stale and hacknied objections. But the misfortune

fortune is, though these audacious sceptics have again and again been answered, they will not be silenced. They echo, with unceasing assiduity, the trite subtleties of ancient deism, or Platonic metaphysics; still hoping, that some unstable soul may be beguiled with their vain words. One advantage, of much more consequence than all their arguments, I fear, we all of us are too ready to give them by our irregular and immoral conduct: for it is a truth not to be dissembled, that the unchristian lives of the professors of Christianity have ever afforded the strongest matter of triumph to its enemies. This, however, it is always in our own power to remove; and sure I am, that both the honour of our holy religion, and a regard to our own happiness, call upon us to remove it speedily. And if these are insufficient; if the mercies of God, who has vouchsafed to us the purest profession of the purest religion, cannot prevail upon us to conform to its precepts, it remains only for his judgments to awaken us to a better sense of our duty. For as the unbeliever will one day find, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men; so also the immoral believer will one day severely feel, that the weakness of God is stronger than men.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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